

From Pedagogy to Andragogy: How well are we preparing our Learners in Bangladesh?

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2023.71041>

Received: 05 September 2023; Revised: 15 September 2023; Accepted: 19 September 2023; Published: 19 October 2023

ABSTRACT

Implementing of andragogic principles in tertiary level instruction in Bangladesh remains a problematic area as in most cases students seem unaware of the dynamism of adult learning. Students who join university continue to depend, to a large extent, on their teachers to explain everything. The researcher was able to make this observation from her own experience of tertiary level teaching in the country. This study was an exploratory one which sought to find out, from students who had recently earned their under graduate degrees, how different their tertiary level instructions were from their school instruction and whether their journey through their alma mater had prepared them to be self-directed and autonomous learners ready to take on the responsibility for their subsequent learning on themselves. The sample comprised of six students from the Department of English and a phenomenological approach was used with semi-structured interview as the data collection tool. Findings showed that students had some initial difficulty adapting to the andragogic approach to learning, but they found it a satisfying and motivating experience which had enabled them to understand the importance of self-determined and autonomous learning.

Key words: andragogy; pedagogy; language instruction; self-directed learning; autonomous learning

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, a distinction has been made between pedagogy and andragogy. The distinction between the two constructs is based on learner characteristics which determine the approaches required to teach them. "Pedagogy and Andragogy model is actually crucial assumptions about the characteristics of learners that consider the whole-person perspective in term of diagnosis of needs, learning climate, and role of their experience" (Delahaye et al., as cited in Noor, Harun & Aris, 2012, p. 674).

The term pedagogy is now used as an umbrella term to refer to the traditional method of teaching where the teacher is the authority figure who plans the lessons, sets the objectives, determines learner needs, and imparts the knowledge (Knowles et al., 2015, p.61). Knowles calls this the content model (Knowles et al., 2015, p.115).

It was Knowles who chalked out the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy in his article entitled 'Androgogy, Not Pedagogy' (1968). Andragogy as a term became further known in the English-speaking nations in connection with adult education after the publication of Knowles's "The Modern Practice of Adult Education" (1970). Knowles was not, however, the first to use the term. As far as it is known, it was Alexander Kapp (1933), a German high school teacher, who first used the term andragogy in a book entitled 'Platon's Erziehungslehre' (Plato's Educational Ideas) in which he talked about the need for lifelong learning. (Reischmann, 2004, p.3).

The term somehow did not gain much popularity despite occasional appearances in Europe in the 1920s. It became a subject of study at the University of Belgrade in the late 1950s. It was Dusan Savicevic, a

professor from that same university who gained fame internationally for his work on andragogy, and it was he who introduced the term to Malcolm Knowles. Andragogy gained popularity under the aegis of Malcolm Knowles who introduced his idea of andragogy to North America in his article. Since then, the term andragogy has become integrally associated with Knowles and his theory of adult education.

Knowles (1998, as cited in Knowles et al., 2015, p.18) outlines six core adult learning principles: 1. The learners' need to know (how, what and why), 2. Self-concept of the learners: autonomous and self-directing, 3. Prior experience of the learner: resource, mental models, 4. Readiness to learn: life-related, developmental task, 5. Orientation to learning: problem centred, contextual, 6. Motivation to learn: intrinsic value, personal pay off.

The Learner's Need to Know

“The core principle that adults need to know why before they engage in learning has led to the now generally accepted premise that adults should be engaged in a collaborative planning process for their learning” (Knowles et al. 2015, p.145). Adult learners need to know what and why they require learning a particular subject. Hicks and Klimoski (1987) in a study involving trainee managers found that the group which was given a clear perception of the topics to be covered and the anticipated outcomes was more prone to believe that the training would be helpful. “The group also believed they were better able to profit from the workshop, showed more commitment to their decision to attend the training, and were more satisfied with the learning.” (as cited in Knowles et al., 2015, p.146).

Adult as self-directed learner

Research on adult learning has established that adults have the ability to undertake self-determined learning or SDL. SDL involves two concepts. “First, SDL is seen as self-teaching, whereby learners are capable of taking control of the mechanics and techniques of teaching themselves in a particular subject” ... and “Second, SDL is conceived of as personal autonomy, which Candy (1991) calls autodidaxy” (Knowles et al., 2015, p.147). These two definitions overlap but are separate in their own rights because a highly autonomous learner may exercise his autonomy and choose to learn under the direction of a teacher instead of choosing to learn on his own. It is generally accepted that all adults do not have the capability for self-teaching or personal autonomy.

Learners' life experience

Traditionally, adult experience was looked upon as a ‘rich resource for learning’ but recently more and more emphasis is put on how life experience can not only facilitate learning but also “impede change because many people resist changes that do not fit their mental model, particularly if change involves restructuring long or deeply held schema” (Knowles et al., 2015, p.151). According to Senge (as cited in Knowles et al., 2015, p.151), “mental models are the cognitive structures that arise from an individual's experiences”.

Readiness to learn

According to Knowles et al. (2015, p.153), if adults perceive a need to learn something they will be ready to learn it. Pratt (1988) “recognizes that most learning experiences are highly situational, and that a learner may exhibit very different behaviors in different learning situations” (as cited in Knowles et al., 2015, p. 153). The same learner may be self-directed in one learning situation and hesitant and dependent in another.

Orientation to learning

Adults are believed to favour “a problem-solving orientation to learning, rather than subject-centered”

(Knowles et al., 2015, p.155). In his article ‘Andragogy: Origins, Development and Trends’, Zmeyov (1998) contends that humanity is moving towards liberation in order to reach its maximum potential. “Hence in order to ensure the achievement of this end adult learners cannot remain passive, but must be active participants in the learning process” (as cited in Muneja, 2017, p. 125).

Motivation

It is believed that adults learn better when their motivation to learn is intrinsic and the results are likely to give them inner satisfaction. McGrath (2009) writes that “Motivation plays an important part in adult learning” because, “if students are not motivated to learn they may not participate in the classroom” (p.103).

Andragogy, however, has not only been conceived as learner characteristics. What Knowles calls the “andragogic process design” comprises seven components that have been adopted as essential to andragogic teaching. These include: “(1) Climate setting; (2) Involving learners in mutual planning; (3) Involving participants in diagnosing their own needs for learning; (4) Involving learners in formulating their learning objectives; (5) Involving learners in designing learning plans; (6) Helping learners carry out their learning plans; (7) Involving learners in evaluating their learning”. (Knowles and Associates, 1984, pp. 15-18, as cited in Pratt, 1993, p.18).

In institutional education students generally join a programme which meets their learning objectives. Therefore, there is no scope for learners to be involved in the formulation of learning objectives. Involving students in mutual planning and designing of learning plans could also pose a problem where the institution may already have a plan in practice. “Adult learning (andragogy) emphasizes more on guiding and helping adults to find knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to solve the life problems they face”(Efgivial et al., 2020, p.185). If that is the case, then autonomy and self-direction become the integral objective of andragogic methodology.

The educational system in Bangladesh follows the traditional approach to classroom instruction where students are regarded as passive vessels which teachers fill with knowledge. As Knowles et al. write “The pedagogical model assigns to the teacher full responsibility for making all decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, when it will be learned, and if it has been learned.” (2005, p.61). The pedagogic approach is appropriate for very young school going children as they are dependent on elders for their basic knowledge. Our students continue to learn under the pedagogical approach till high school.

However, our tertiary level education takes a different more andragogic approach. Bangladesh being a monolingual country where English is learnt mainly as a foreign language, students of the English department continue to learn the language even as they study literature as content in most of their undergraduate courses. In reality, the majority of the students join the English department with the expectation that they will gain complete proficiency in English by studying here. This study sought to find out how students of English perceived their tertiary education to be different from their school learning and whether it was easy for them to adjust to the andragogic principles of adult learning. Most of the research on andragogy involving tertiary level students has been on the learning orientation of students mainly because andragogy is a theory which defines learner characteristics rather than teaching methodology. This study, however, explored whether tertiary level education in Dhaka was able achieve the ultimate objectives of an andragogic approach to teaching.

METHODS

A qualitative approach was used in this study. The design was phenomenological, and in-depth data was obtained from the sample about their learning experiences in order to understand the nature of their tertiary level education from their perspective. Students were encouraged to reflect and talk about their learning

experience at school and at tertiary level to gain an understanding of how they perceived their learning experiences, and what they felt they had taken away from these experiences.

The sample were six students from the Department of English of a private university in Dhaka who had recently completed their undergraduate studies successfully. The participants were chosen from those students who had either performed well or had earned average results. Among the participants, three were males and three females.

A semi-structured interview form was devised to obtain insights into the participants' learning experiences and their feelings about them. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The relevant common themes that emerged were later presented in detail with direct quotes to validate the findings.

The research question to which this study sought an answer was: Did the learning experience at tertiary level help students to become self-determined learners and did it instill in them the confidence to work on their own?

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participants had similar experiences of learning at school and high school level where teachers came to class, taught from the textbooks and asked students to learn. Discussions about the objectives of their lessons did not take place. One participant said of his school teaching, "... the teaching was very theoretical. All the teachers taught in the same way". Another participant said, "They (teachers) came to class, taught the lesson and left. They did not discuss why we should learn English or how we can communicate fluently (in English)...". A third participant said, "I depended totally on my teachers and the English for Today book". (English for Today is the school level English textbook series from classes one to ten). It was clear from the data that the learning experience of all the participants was mainly pedagogical in nature. "In the pedagogical model, the whole responsibility of what is learned, how it is learned, when it is learned and whether it is learned falls upon the teacher" (Tezcan, 2022, p.137). The students were merely told what and when to learn something and they did exactly as they were told.

When asked about tertiary level teaching all the participants found it very different from their earlier learning experience. As one participant said, "It was very very different". The concept that learners become self-determined and autonomous as they reach adulthood was not, however, true of the participants in this study, because, five out of six participants said that they initially faced difficulties coping with the new more learner centered approach, and it had taken them two to three semesters to adapt to the new way of learning. They said that their instructors made them realize that they had to take responsibility for their learning, but they could not feel comfortable enough to open up in class for several semesters. One participant said university education had prepared him to take decisions and responsibility for work. He was the only participant who said that he did not find it that difficult to adjust to the different learning methods at university.

Most of the respondents' claim that adjusting to the more andragogic approach to learning had not been easy points to a need for such an approach to be introduced even when students are still adolescents. Younger learners may not have an orientation towards self-direction, but, studies have proven that if students are given proper guidance, they can become autonomous and self-determined. Leni Dam devised "a unique approach to developing language learner self-direction in her students. Her approach has been put into practice in numerous classrooms across Europe and is supported by rigorously conducted empirical research" (Dam, 1995; Dam & Legenhausen, 1996 as cited in Brewer, 2016, p. 26). The pedagogical approach suppresses the learners natural need for autonomy. Once students become part of a learning experience which is more autonomy supportive, they find satisfaction in exercising their autonomy to learn in their own way. One must keep in mind, though, that an autonomous learner need not be a self-directed

one, as she might choose to be guided by an instructor. The goal of the teaching, however, should be to nurture autonomy as well as self-directedness in the learners.

The data clearly demonstrated that learners in this study were initially not self-determined learners by virtue of their being adults. The findings of this study were more in keeping with the views of Larsson (2006) and Håkansson (2007) who noted that “The assertion that adults are competent by virtue of their experiences and that self-direction is natural and necessary for adult learners is not convenient for all adults”. (as cited in Loeng, 2018, p. 8). Håkansson (2007, as cited in Loeng, 2018, p.8) made two observations. First is that, becoming adults does not endow one with the capability to be self-determined. Secondly, being self-directed is not necessarily a need for all adults. The concept itself, that learners can be self-directed, was something the learners in this study had not known. Despite facing difficulties, they had risen to the task and worked towards becoming self-directed. A point was noted by Abdullah, Chamid and Khamim (2021) that learners who find themselves in a learning situation where they have to take the initiative to learn without having acquired “self-directed investigative skills will experience anxiety, frustration, and often failure, and so will their teachers” (p. 4). This gives rise to the speculation that students who had not fared that well in the undergraduate classes may have found it more difficult to adjust to the new approach to learning, reiterating the fact that becoming adults does not automatically give learners the ability of self-directed learning.

“Adult learners need to know why they are learning new knowledge before they are willing to participate” (McGrath, 2009, p. 99). At tertiary level, the participants did not only get course outlines where the course objectives were clearly defined but their instructors also discussed the learning objectives with them. The participants said that they were also engaged in discussions about why they needed to learn the different courses by their faculty members. The learners had looked upon this as a positive approach to their learning because adults “are practical in their approach to learning and wish to learn how it would serve their current and future needs” (Joshi,2017, p.7).

Houde (2006) writes that “Not knowing why learning something is important is associated with a state of low or no motivation” (p. 92). Hence, Knowles’ principle of ‘*need to know*’ and ‘*motivation*’ is mutually linked in adult learners. Houde (2006, p. 92) makes a further connection by saying that an adult will move from “no motivation (amotivation) to motivation in regard to learning something by making clear to her that the learning is connected to goals she values and making clear her ability to learn the material”. The learners in this study were initially not very motivated to learn on their own. All the participants said that they felt motivated to learn on their own only after they had overcome the initial difficulty of adjusting to the new way of learning. It was not clear, however, whether their motivation was intrinsic, because all participants were focused on the extrinsic value of their learning, i.e. how their learning experience had prepared them for graduate studies or their careers. But the data clearly pointed to the fact that the learners’ need to know what and why they were learning was satisfied, so, part of their motivation must have been due to the fact that they knew why they were learning something and what they would gain from learning it. However, the participants themselves did not make that connection. They merely said that after they began to feel comfortable with the new approach, they became more motivated to learn.

“Another suitable approach to teaching languages to adults is the dialogic approach, which combines humanistic and pragmatic-communicative issues to build and promote relationships” (Tardi, 2021, p. 98). This was true of the learning experiences of the participants as all of them agreed that, in university, they had been actively involved in the learning process where they had been able to openly share and exchange their ideas and opinions. They, once again, said that initially they found it difficult to participate in any discussion as they were not used to such a learning process and so felt inhibited. One participant expressed that her reluctance to speak up was also because she did not feel confident speaking in English as she had never spoken in English before joining university. The speaking and writing course in the first semester had really helped her. Another participant said that they were all expected to participate, but couldn’t always do

it. She said, “I can speak openly now, but couldn’t earlier”. One respondent said that all teachers invited students to engage in discussions, but the problem was with the students who had “speaking anxiety and they were unwilling to talk”. Their learning at school had not prepared them for such engagements with teachers. One of the participants said that even though she was much more confident now, she still felt anxious to speak up.

“In adult learning, learning is usually dependent on exploration, transformation and the search for making life more meaningful. In this sense, learners’ experiences should have the highest value” (Kurtul & Arik, 2020, p.166). The contention that adult learners’ life experiences impact their learning was not that apparent in the participants’ learning. When asked about it, only three out of the six participants could recall, after several probes, that they could relate their learning to their own experiences in certain courses. Different experiences of learners could account for this disparity. Or, perhaps, three of the participants, merely, could not recall the contents of courses to which they could relate. The other three participants could relate to their own experiences with content from different courses. However, there was no way of knowing whether their schema of the world facilitated or inhibited their learning in any way.

Two of the respondents said they read outside the textbooks. Another student said that they had to read a great deal on their own for assignments. The other three did not give a direct response to the question whether they read resource books from outside the syllabus but did say they had to read on their own. Obviously, all of them exercised their autonomy in their own way and each learner followed his/her own path to reach the learning objectives.

When asked if they were satisfied with their tertiary level learning experience all the participants gave positive answers. They did not only say it, but it was also evident from the eagerness with which they spoke of their learning experience at tertiary level. The fact that all the respondents found their university education satisfactory was in keeping with the findings of a study conducted in Pakistan involving 468 participants which showed that the majority of the participants found the andragogical approach very satisfying (as cited in Ekoto & Gaikwad, 2015, p.1180). However, it was difficult to predict from this study which andragogical approach had a significant contribution to learner satisfaction.

The respondents expressed their awareness of the fact that they needed to be self-directed learners. One participant said that she felt that her education had prepared her up to 80% to face her future but she realized that she had to continue learning as “learning is a life-long process”. She said she was trying to develop herself more. Another respondent said that although teacher facilitation is important, learning the art to learn by oneself was equally important. Despite the fact that the participants felt that they were more confident and were sure that they could now take up the challenge of a career, when asked if they would be able to learn on their own if they went for higher studies, they all said that even though they now know the strategies required to learn on their own, they would still need the guidance and help of teachers. They said that it would not have been possible for them to succeed at the undergraduate level without their teachers. And they attributed their success only partially to their own efforts. So, whenever, new content is to be learnt, teacher guidance was expected.

Their contention that their success would not have been possible without their teachers was evidence that learners prefer a blending of andragogical and pedagogical approach to teaching. This finding coincided with that of Nur, Harun and Aris (2012) who found in their study that most undergraduate students “preferred a combination of pedagogical and andragogical orientation on their learning process” (p. 677). Other research studies have also found that young adults within the age of 18 to 24 preferred a learning approach that followed both pedagogical and andragogical principles (Choy & Delahaye, 2002; Choy & Delahaye, 2003, Zaidatun et al., 2008, as cited in Noor, Harun & Aris, 2012, p. 677). A study by Ekoto and Gaikwad among adult ESL learners in Turkey also showed that ESL adult learners “exhibited both

pedagogical and andragogical orientations with andragogy having a higher percentage” (Ekoto & Gaikwad, 2015, p. 1180).

So, after analyzing the findings we can say that once the participants had learnt the strategies to learn on their own and had adapted to a more learner centered method of learning, they had felt motivated to learn. The respondents spoke of feeling motivated to study on their own and eagerly spoke of how their learning had prepared them for their future. Although their responses pointed to a more extrinsic motivation, there must have been some intrinsic satisfaction gained from this sense of achievement. They did not, however, speak of it. The results of this study did not establish without doubt that adult learners come to the classroom with certain characteristics which are different from young learners as is Knowles’ contention. There was no evidence to suggest that initially, they were in any way autonomous or self-directed in their approach to learning. It could not be established whether the students’ life experiences helped them to learn or not. The fact that three of the respondents could not recall courses which they could relate to their own experiences does not necessarily mean that their learning had not been facilitated by their prior experience. Prior experience could have helped without students being explicitly aware of it.

However, the one thing that came out for a fact was that the sample’s learning experience had given them not only the ability but also the willingness to self-direct their learning. This confidence in the participants was apparent from the conviction with which they spoke of their ability to move on to their immediate goals of either joining graduate classes or embarking on their careers. The findings also established that even if adult learners have a need for autonomy and self-directedness, individuals do not automatically acquire the ability to exercise their autonomy or self-direct their learning as they approach adulthood. Learner autonomy needs to be fostered by educators in the classroom and the ability for self-directed learning has to be taught.

It could be concluded from the analysis of the findings that tertiary level education is definitely more andragogic in nature. It is obviously more geared towards promoting self-directed and autonomous learning. It was interesting to note that when students spoke of their success, it was in terms of how their language fluency had improved and how they understood the need to continue learning. “Self-directed learning is a process in which a learner assumes responsibility to control their learning objectives and means in order to meet their personal goals or the perceived demands of their individual context” (Morris, 2019, para1). According to the participants of this study, their tertiary level education had been able to provide them with that ability.

“Andragogical learning involves the adult learner making decisions about the what, how, where, when and why of their learning” (Booth & Segon, 2009, as cited in Jeanes, 2020, p.5). It justifies a change in the approach to teaching on the basis of the changes that learners go through as they mature and reach adulthood. It, therefore, has to take into account the changes in the social standing of the learner as he becomes an adult, and the need to prepare him for the responsibilities that he will have to shoulder. As Jeanes (2021) writes, “The pedagogical (quite literally ‘child focused guidance’) and the andragogical (or ‘adult focused guidance’) assume differences between learning styles and needs that require a different art and science of education (p.1).

However, it has to be accepted that teaching at tertiary level, too, cannot entirely be andragogic in approach. Students joining the Department of English have very little or no familiarity with the course contents of the undergraduate syllabus. So instructors have to explain the content, and classes are essentially pedagogical in nature. As McGrath (2009) writes, “... in reality lecturers in many instances use a pedagogical style of teaching at the start of a course in order to ensure that students gain an understanding of a topic that they may not be very familiar with”(p.101). From the teachers’ perspective, the best approach to teaching would be a blending of the pedagogic and andragogic approaches. For example, teachers may start off with a pedagogic method, but “As the course progresses the student is asked to apply examples from their own

background to the course so they can create a link between their own experience and the course material” (p. 101). The findings of this study show that students, too, prefer teacher direction as well as a student-centred approach which involves them as active participants in the learning process.

This study was able to establish, to a large extent, that tertiary level education in Bangladesh is moving in the right direction, and andragogic principles are applied in the classroom. It is our learners who are not prepared for such learning experience. They do not come for tertiary level education with the characteristics of adult learners, as identified by Knowles. The traits that define an adult learner are repressed by the pedagogical model of learning to which our students are subjected up until they reach tertiary level. Learners who have only been exposed to the pedagogical model of learning do not have an awareness of their changing needs as adults. The realization of their latent desire for autonomy, and self-directedness is absent in them. They do not know that once they know the objectives and the benefits they will gain from their learning, they would feel both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to learn. Only an andragogic approach to learning can enable learners reach that realization and help them reach their full potential as adults. The andragogic principle of learning prepares adults for their future learning, professional or otherwise. “Sufirmansya (2019) found that adults have a desire, capacity, intention, and requirement to learn because of the importance of learning for one’s career” (as cited in El Amin,2020, p.56).

However, the fact remains that, quite a number of students continue to struggle with the andragogic model of learning and find it easier to depend on their instructors for all aspects of their learning. An obvious solution to this problem is the introduction of andragogic teaching from school level. “Knowles himself concedes that four of andragogy’s five key assumptions apply equally to adults and children” (Conner, 2004, p.2). The difference is that children do not have as much experience, so they also have fewer biases. Studies have also established that young children benefit from an autonomy supportive learning environment as much as adults.

“The highly successful classroom practices that emerged under the aegis of Leni Dam in the 1970s give testament to the fact that young children respond very well to autonomy supportive learning processes” (Little, 2021, pp. 177-178). Leni Dam(2011) herself wrote in her article ‘Developing Learner Autonomy with School Kids: Principles, practices, results’ (p. 40) why it is important to develop learner autonomy in school children basing her observations on her own success in developing learner autonomy in her mixed ability students in a school in Copenhagen. As Joshi (2017) writes, “Educators as well as the educational systems world-wide should provide all learners, both children and adults, with the opportunities to be actively engaged in participatory learning to enhance young minds in diagnosing their own learning needs & their experiences” (p.11). Other studies have also shown that an andragogical approach to teaching helps young students. Omoregie (2019) writes of Avoseh’s experiment in which the andragogical approach was used with grade 12 students successfully to promote “learners’ centredness”. He takes that as evidence that, “the biological age of learners does not matter for the use of andragogy” (p.29). As St. Claire and Kapplinger (2019) write, “Andragogy is no longer a specific teaching and learning practice for use with adults, but a mode of teaching applicable to any context” (p.281).

CONCLUSION

Hence, the findings of this study have implications for language teaching methodology in schools and a need for revising the wholly pedagogical approach to teaching that is the usual practice. This, however, does not mean that the pedagogical approach is to be rejected. Not only does common sense dictate it, but the participants of this study also said that they need the support of instructors for explanation of new content. Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that a blending of pedagogical and andragogic principles of teaching can bring about optimum learning where all the needs of the learners are addressed. Findings of this study showed tertiary level teaching practices in our country in a positive light, but it is felt that further research involving a larger sample from different universities is required to make the findings generalizable.

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