

PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING IN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract - This study explores the philosophical implications of self-directed learning (SDL) within adult education programmes in Nigeria. SDL is a learning approach where individuals take the initiative, with or without assistance, to diagnose their learning needs, set goals, identify resources, and evaluate outcomes. In Nigeria, adult education serves as a vital tool for socio-economic development, offering opportunities for individuals who missed formal education to acquire knowledge and skills. However, implementation of SDL in these programmes faces challenges, including inadequate resources, poor learning environments, and a lack of trained adult education facilitators. Philosophically, SDL aligns with theories of andragogy and existentialism, emphasizing learner-centredness and the intrinsic motivation of adults to learn. Despite these challenges, SDL holds the potential to transform adult education programmes in Nigeria by promoting life-long learning (LLL), enhancing employability, and fostering personal growth. This study therefore suggested the need for a more supportive learning environment and adequate resources to fully realize the benefits of SDL in adult education programmes in Nigeria.

Keywords: Adult education programmes, adult learners, adult education facilitators, self-directed learning, philosophical implications.

Introduction

The concept of self-directed learning has garnered significant attention in the field of adult education, particularly in its application within various educational frameworks. In Nigeria, where adult education plays a critical role in addressing educational disparities and promoting lifelong learning, the philosophical underpinnings of self-directed learning present both challenges and opportunities. Therefore, education for the adult is a way in which adult learners take on a systematic learning and continue to be self-educating in order to improve their knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values. Education for adults may be referred to as any form of learning adults can involve themselves in beyond conventional learning institutions, including fundamental literacy to self-fulfillment as all-time learners. Adult education reflects on thoughts about knowledge and teaching based on the statement that adult learners can learn what they want to learn as the case may be (United Nation Education Scientific and

Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2019). Adult education has the objective of providing education that will enable youth as well as mature adults to improve their knowledge and skills within in all the aspect in life (Kumar, 2007). Education for the adult is undertaking sequential and organized educational activities on various subjects such as health and family welfare, agriculture and animal husbandry, among others for both men and women who are no longer in school, or do not attend school on a regular or full-time basis, or who earlier dropped out from the conventional school system (Mbah, 2014; Obetta, 2024). Adult education is needed to make adult life happy, satisfy the recreational needs of the rural adults, supplement the compulsory primary education, and provide continuing education.

In adult education, the concept of self-directed learning has great importance. This term arose in the field of adult education in the 1970s and is still a widely used term in the field. Adult education is a powerful tool for social and economic mobility, enabling individual to acquire the skills, knowledge, and credentials needed to access new opportunities, improve their socio-economic status, and achieve their goals. Adult Education is an instrument that provides adults with the skills required for social living. Adult education is a practice in which adults engage in systematic and sustained self-educating activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values (Ekere & Agbo, 2017). Furthermore, examining the philosophical implications of self-directed learning in the context of adult education in Nigeria can provide valuable insights into the underlying principles and beliefs that shape educational practices in the country.

Concepts of Adult Education

Adult education engages adults in systematic and sustained learning activities. Adult education programmes are forms of education designed for people especially the adults who were unable to go through the formal school system or who dropped out of the formal school system (Omolewa, 2018). Adult education programmes can empower people who were not privileged to embark on formal system of education by adopting some programmes such as functional literacy education, vocational education, entrepreneurial education, agricultural extension education, continuing education, remedial studies and life-long learning among others (National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education [NMEC], 2013). Unlike traditional education, which is

typically aimed at younger learners, adult education is designed to meet the specific needs and circumstances of adults, who often juggle learning with other responsibilities such as work, family, and community obligations (Benavot et al., 2022). According to Obetta (2021), adult education is an important tool for implementing the socio-economic reform programmes of the government aimed at improving the economy's productivity and competitiveness.

Adult education encompasses a wide range of learning experiences, including formal education (structured courses leading to a qualification), non-formal education (short courses, workshops, and community-based learning), and informal education (self-directed learning and experiential learning) (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016; Knowles et al., 2020). This diversity reflects the varying goals and motivations of adult learners, who may seek education for personal development, professional advancement, or social engagement. Adult education programmes refer to an educational programme that provides opportunity for persons who no longer attend school on regular and fulltime basis to undertake sequential and organized educational activities with the intent of bringing about changes in knowledge, skills, understanding and appreciation (Obetta & Egwuekwe, 2018). Adult education programmes also increase employment, act as greater mobility of the labour force and social cohesion; reduce poverty and social marginalization, protect environment and achieve sustainable development (Obetta, 2019). These adult education programmes training may be at short or low intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops, seminars and conferences among others. For instance, vocational skills like tailoring, decoration, cake bakery and weaving among others are acquired to empower the adults for self-reliance (UNESCO, 2019). Adult education programmes are flexible, learner-centred, contextualized and uses a participatory approach (Bernadette, 2015).

In view of the above definitions, adult education programmes are educational activities that are organized, planned, coordinated and controlled to be carried outside the formal school system with the aim of imparting knowledge, skills and attitude to the individuals so as to improve their standard of living. In the Nigerian context, adult education plays a crucial role in addressing issues of educational inequality and literacy. It provides opportunities for those who missed out on formal education during their childhood to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills, pursue vocational training, or engage in lifelong learning.

Adult education programmes include family literacy programme, life skills programme, civic education programme, adult vocational programme and workplace programme among others (Usman, 2015; Akpala, 2018; Abua, 2024). Moreover, adult education in Nigeria is often linked to broader social goals, such as poverty alleviation, community development, and national progress.

These adult and non-formal education programmes are vocational education, continuing education, functional literacy education and agricultural extension education among others (NMEC), 2013). In addition, adult education programmes aim to provide education that will enable young as well as mature adults to improve or supplement their knowledge and skills with general subjects (Kumar, 2017). It also aims to enhance adults' ability to improve their future job and educational possibilities. Furthermore, adult education is education meant to liberate people from ignorance, dependency, improved man's control over freedom, improving family health and protecting environment. Adult education therefore is important for many reasons which include the following: adult education builds an economic prosperity of individuals and the nation; it helps adults and families thrive because the programmes are designed to boost the academic achievement of citizens from low-income neighbourhood to a more successful level if education is simultaneously provided; adult education helps to strengthen communities and democracy because people with more education earn higher income and pay more tax which help communities to prosper and it gives training and imparts the necessary skills to individuals who aspire to be self-reliant economically.

However, it is noted that in Nigeria, adult education has been in operation for decades, even before the independence of Nigeria. Many religious bodies like Islamic religion teach Quran to their children and adults in Mosque, especially in the morning and evening times where they learn how to read, write and recite Quran. Even till today, they are still teaching their religion members basic literacy, while Christians also teach their children and adults about Jesus Christ, and they learn how to read, write and preach the Gospel (Yahaya, 2013). Presently, government has established so many centres for adult education programmes where adults can learn so many skills such as vocational skills like cake baking, tailoring, hair dressing, and welding, among others. Irrespective of the various attempts by different religious bodies in Nigeria and the government, yet, adult learners are not well engaged in adult education programmes activities

such as vocational education, functional literacy, continuing education, agricultural extension education, among others (UNESCO, 2019). This is as a result of poor conducive environment for learning, inadequate materials for teaching and learning, and inadequate trained adult education facilitators among others. The above factors hindering adults from engaging in self-directed learning has led to adult disengagement in self-directed learning activities thereby losing hope in their problem-solving and even at their profession. This has posed a serious challenge which mars their self-directed learning (Yahaya, 2013). They are not motivated to be engaged in self-directed learning in the different adult education programmes.

Adult education is about fostering critical thinking, self-direction, and active participation in society. It is grounded in principles of humanism, which philosophically centres on the learner's autonomy, self-actualization, and the intrinsic value of learning (Aloni, 2003). It also draws on critical pedagogy, emphasizing the empowerment of learners through education, enabling them to critically engage with and transform their social realities (Wang & Sarbo, 2004). Furthermore, the major characteristic of adult education is that educating adults (Andragogy) differs from educating children (Pedagogy) in several ways given that adults have accumulated knowledge and work experience which can add to their learning experience. Most adult education is voluntary, therefore, the participants are generally self-motivated unless required to participate, by an employer. The science and art of helping adults learn as well as the practice of adult education is referred to as andragogy to distinguish it from the traditional school-based education for children pedagogy. Unlike children, adults are seen as more self-directed, rather than relying on others for help.

Concept of Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning (SDL) is the learning that the individuals carry out on their own. In other words, the individuals themselves pay attention and direct their learning. SDL is an educational approach where learners take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (Ahammad, 2023). Rooted in the principles of autonomy, self-motivation, and lifelong learning, SDL emphasizes the learner's active role in the educational process, shifting from a traditional teacher-centred model to one where the learner is at the

centre of their own learning journey (Loeng, 2020; Grover et al., 2017; Grover, 2015).

SDL has proven to be advantageous to the individuals in a number of ways. SDL does not mean that all learning will take place in isolation from others (Abdullah, 2019). The individuals are required to communicate and take assistance and guidance from others. Self-directed learners are able to transfer learning, in terms of both knowledge and skills in terms of one situation to another. Abdullah further stated that in self-directed learning, the individuals are required to make use of resources, such as, self-guided reading, participation in discussion groups, internships, electronic dialogues and reflective writing activities. Francis (2017) stated that SDL is that which gives learners the freedom and autonomy to choose the what, why, how, and where of their learning.

However, for adult education programmes to be achieved through SDL, adult learners' engagements in adult education programmes are very vital to be considered. Consequently, optimum ability to be effectively engaged in one's academic and professional development may be attained by encouraging SDL; which is characterized by the ability to take initiative in learning tasks with or without assistance (Gunduz & Hürsen, 2015). Therefore, self-direction in learning is a potential motivational model to facilitate study engagement and promote the tendency for lifelong learning (LLL) among adult learners. In this learning, the educators are required to render an effective contribution by promoting dialogue with the learners, securing resources, evaluating outcomes and encouraging critical thinking (Long et al., 2020).

Furthermore, educational institutions are developing innovative responses to SDL. There has been implementation of programmes and practices that would be worthwhile in the development of SDL (Taylor, 2016). In SDL, the adult learners usually make use of written communication to communicate with adult education facilitators, supervisors or fellow students. This learning has proven to be beneficial to the adult learners, particularly when they are living at a distance (Din et al., 2016). The adult learners usually feel contented, pleasurable, when they get engaged and motivated in this type of learning. They themselves possess the authority to carry out tasks and activities on their own. When they put into practice, their tasks and activities with diligence and resourcefulness, they are able to benefit on a large scale.

The incorporation of modern and innovative methods has rendered an indispensable contribution in promoting SDL. The adult learners are making extensive usage of technologies in not only preparation of assignments, projects and presentations, but they are making use of internet and learning apps to enhance their learning. Guglielmino (2013) described the various SDL efforts in various government, industry, health, religion and military settings. However, when adult learners are participating in SDL, it is vital for them to develop interest and willingness. The development of interest and enthusiasm will enable the adult learners to have access to support and guidance, improve their performance and carry out various tasks and activities in a well-organized manner. Relatively, Francis (2017) stressed that SDL is that which gives learners the freedom and autonomy to choose the what, why, how, and where of their learning. In addition, Brandt (2020) revealed four dimensions of SDL which include: Self-regulation: the ability to plan, direct and control one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors during learning tasks (Taylor, 2016); Motivation: the desire to engage in activity that emerges from the inherent enjoyment of an activity or a sense of obligation to engage in a task (Pink, 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2020); Personal responsibility: a willingness to take full responsibility for one's actions. Learners who demonstrate personal responsibility operate with integrity and action concordance with clear ethical principles (Battelle, 2019). Autonomy: the ability to recognize available choices and take charge of one's learning, control choices through on-going reflection and evaluation. Autonomy develops as learners work independently or collaboratively to set goals, plan learning, select resources and learning strategies, and monitor and evaluate progress (Reinders, 2016).

Similarly, Boyer et al. (2014) stated that in order to carry out self-directed learning in an appropriate manner, it is vital for the individuals to take into account the following factors: Motivation: This is the act or process of encouraging or reinforcing adult learners either intrinsic or extrinsic to enable them engage and promote lifelong learning among others; Self-efficacy: This is an act of having or showing a tendency to make oneself modestly or shyly inconspicuous in the learning processes. Support and performance: This is the act of promoting the interest or cause of carrying out something especially in adult learning context as the case maybe.

Furthermore, SDL has many features. According to Khiat (2015), SDL offers unique characteristics that are typically not found in traditional classroom-style of learning. The most distinctive feature of SDL is flexibility, as it allows a self-directed learner to design and structure their own unique learning experience. Brandt (2020), stated that they can choose “the who”, “the what”, “the where” and “the how” regarding their learning experience. As a result, learners can guide their learning journey along whatever path they choose, with experiential learning and training as key components (Gugliemino, 2013). By viewing learning as tools that will help them progress in their personal and professional lives, self-directed learners naturally become motivated to learn. Students can self-advocate for what they need to learn most effectively, such as requesting a different workspace or using more visual materials.

Self-directed learning (SDL) has its philosophical foundations in humanistic and constructivist theories of education. Humanistic educators like Malcolm Knowles have contributed significantly to the development of SDL, particularly in the context of adult education, by promoting the idea that adults are naturally self-directed learners (Knowles et al., 2020). Constructivist theories, on the other hand, highlight the importance of learners constructing their own understanding and knowledge through experiences and interactions with their environment (Chand, 2023).

In practice, SDL involves a high degree of learner autonomy, where individuals are responsible for identifying what they need to learn and how best to learn it (Morris et al., 2023). This approach allows learners to tailor their education to their personal and professional needs, making learning more relevant and meaningful. It also encourages the development of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and the ability to adapt to new situations—skills that are essential in a rapidly changing world (Dahal & Bhat, 2024; Bouchard, 2012).

In the Nigerian context, SDL is particularly relevant in adult education programmes, where learners often have diverse backgrounds, varying levels of prior education, and different life experiences. The flexibility of SDL allows these learners to pursue education at their own pace and according to their own schedules, which is crucial given the various socio-economic challenges they may face (Anshu et al., 2022; Morris et al., 2023). However, the successful implementation of SDL in Nigeria also requires consideration of cultural attitudes

towards education, the availability of resources, and the support systems in place to guide learners in their educational pursuits.

Importance of Self-Directed Learning in Adult Education Programmes

Self-directed learning is very important in adult education programmes. Morris (2019) outlined the reasons for the application of the self-directed learning method in the teaching and learning situations to include: it enables students to unleash their imaginative and intuitive capacities through self-directed learning; it facilitates students to go beyond the content given, to think critically, reason and problem solving; it engages students in project-based learning strategy and it promotes the goals of self-directed learning using differentiate instruction.

In addition, Brandt (2020) outlined the positive effects of SDL to include improved self-confidence, initiative and life satisfaction, better employability skills, increased independence, and provision of greater happiness and success. The importance of SDL in adult education can be understood through its impact on learners' empowerment and autonomy, personalized learning, lifelong learning and adaptability, development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, cultural relevance and contextual learning, encouragement of lifelong learning. On empowerment and autonomy, SDL empowers adult learners by placing them at the centre of their educational experience (Dahal & Bhat, 2024; Brockett & Hiemstra, 2018). In contrast to traditional, teacher-led approaches, SDL allows adults to take control of their learning journey, making decisions about what, how, and when to learn. This autonomy fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, which is particularly important for adults who may have had limited educational opportunities earlier in life. By engaging in SDL, learners are able to pursue education that is directly relevant to their personal and professional goals, making the learning process more meaningful and motivating.

On personalized learning, adult learners come from diverse backgrounds with varying levels of experience, knowledge, and learning needs. SDL allows for personalized learning experiences that can be tailored to the specific goals and interests of each learner (Morris et al., 2023; Bernacki et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2014). This individualized approach is essential in adult education programmes, where the one-size-fits-all model is often ineffective. Through SDL, learners can focus on areas that are most relevant to their current or future roles, ensuring that the education they receive is immediately applicable and valuable. Lifelong

learning and adaptability is another positive effect of SDL. In a rapidly changing world, the ability to continuously learn and adapt is crucial. SDL promotes the development of lifelong learning skills by encouraging learners to seek out new knowledge and skills on their own (Elderson-Van Duin et al., 2023; Silamut & Petsangsri, 2020). This approach not only prepares adults to adapt to changes in their personal and professional lives but also instills a habit of continuous self-improvement. As the global economy evolves, the ability to self-direct learning becomes a vital skill, enabling individuals to stay relevant and competitive in their fields.

On development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, SDL encourages learners to engage deeply with the content they are studying, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Adult learners in SDL programmes must often analyze information, make decisions, and solve problems independently, which enhances their cognitive abilities (Boateng et al., 2022). These skills are essential in both personal and professional contexts, where adults are required to navigate complex situations and make informed decisions. Furthermore, SDL creates cultural relevance and contextual learning. In the Nigerian context, where educational resources and opportunities may be limited, SDL offers a flexible and accessible approach to learning. It allows adult learners to study at their own pace, within their own cultural contexts, and according to their own schedules. This flexibility is particularly important in Nigeria, where many adults balance education with work, family, and community responsibilities (Van Woezik et al., 2021; Merriam, 2001). SDL can be adapted to fit within these constraints, making it a practical and effective approach to adult education.

On encouragement of lifelong learning, self-directed learning can help create a culture of lifelong learning within communities. This is particularly important in Nigeria, where ongoing education is necessary to keep up with social and economic changes (Dahal & Bhat, 2024 ; Biney, 2023; Morris et al., 2023; Brookfield, 1984). Encouraging adults to take charge of their learning can lead to a more educated and adaptable population, better equipped to contribute to national development.

Philosophical Implications of Self-Directed Learning in Adult Education Programmes

The philosophical implications of self-directed learning (SDL) in adult education programmes in Nigeria revolve around the paradigm shift from adult education facilitator-centredness to learner-centeredness, where learners take

responsibility for their learning needs, goals resources, strategies and outcome (Long et al., 2020). This approach aligns with the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, emphasizing the growth in the capacity and needs of learners to be self-directing as an essential component in maturity. SDL assumes that human beings grow in capacity and need to be self-directing as an essential component in maturity, and those learners' experiences become increasingly rich resources for learning that should be exploited along with the resources of experts (Gugliemino, 2013). It also assumes that individual learners become ready to learn what is required to perform their evolving life tasks or to cope more adequately with their life problems, and that the natural orientation of individuals is task or problem-centered. The motivational incentives of self-directed learning in adult education programmes enhance learners' interest and achievement in adult education (Loeng, 2020). Properly harnessing self-directed learning in adult education programmes facilitators can increase learners' interest and achievement, reducing challenges in adult education (Long et al., 2020).

Furthermore, SDL has a theoretical framework such as andragogy. Andragogy is defined as the art and practice of helping them to learn. Reinders (2016) states that SDL is the capacity of adults to embark on critical self-reflection that will change their lives. It is an internal force that compels adult learners to assimilate and internalize information in circumstances they find themselves. On the other hand, Knowles (2019) stated that SDL means that individuals take the initiative with or without the help of others in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes.

SDL in adult education is not only a practical approach to learning but also carries significant philosophical implications. These implications extend to the nature of knowledge, the role of the learner and educator, the purpose of education, and the broader societal impacts of learning. SDL challenges traditional epistemological views that position educators as the primary source of knowledge and learners as passive recipients (Rahman & Cochrane, 2023). Instead, SDL aligns with constructivist theories of knowledge, which argue that learners actively construct their understanding through experience and reflection. This shift has profound implications for adult education, where learners bring

diverse life experiences and prior knowledge to the learning process (du Toit-Brits, 2019). In the Nigerian context, SDL encourages the validation of indigenous knowledge systems and personal experiences, acknowledging that learning is not limited to formal education but is a lifelong process that occurs in various contexts.

Philosophically, SDL emphasizes the importance of autonomy and agency in learning. It reflects existentialist ideas that individuals are responsible for creating meaning in their lives, including their educational journeys (Guignon, 1998). For adult learners in Nigeria, many of whom may have faced educational barriers earlier in life; SDL offers a pathway to reclaiming control over their education and future. This autonomy is empowering, fostering a sense of personal responsibility and self-efficacy, which are crucial for both personal and societal development. Furthermore, SDL aligns with the democratic ideals of education, promoting equality and inclusivity. It supports the notion that education should be accessible to all, regardless of socio-economic status, age, or background. In Nigeria, where educational disparities are prevalent, SDL offers an opportunity to democratize education by allowing learners to pursue education on their own terms, outside the constraints of formal institutions (du Toit-Brits, 2019). This approach challenges hierarchical structures in education, advocating for a more learner-centered and equitable system.

In a related development, SDL has the potential to be a transformative process, leading to profound changes in how individuals view themselves and the world. Drawing on the theories of transformative learning, SDL encourages critical reflection and questioning of previously held assumptions (Southworth, 2022). For Nigerian adults, many of whom may engage in SDL as a means of overcoming past educational limitations, this process can lead to significant personal and social transformation. It allows learners to challenge societal norms, address issues of social justice, and contribute to community development. In addition, the emphasis on learner autonomy in SDL raises important ethical considerations, particularly regarding the role of the educator. In SDL, educators act as facilitators rather than authoritative figures, guiding learners in their self-directed journey (Şahin & Doğantay, 2018). This shift requires educators to respect the autonomy of learners, providing support without imposing their own views or expectations. In the Nigerian context, where traditional educational models often emphasize authority and discipline, this represents a significant

philosophical shift that requires careful consideration of the ethical implications for both educators and learners.

SDL advocates for education that is relevant to the learner's cultural and social context. In Nigeria, this means recognizing the diversity of learners and their unique cultural backgrounds. SDL encourages the incorporation of local knowledge, practices, and values into the learning process, making education more meaningful and applicable to the learners' lives (Druker-Ibáñez & Cáceres-Jensen, 2022). This approach challenges the dominance of Western educational models and supports the development of an education system that is reflective of Nigerian realities. Also, the adoption of SDL in adult education programmes can have broader social and political implications. By promoting autonomy, critical thinking, and lifelong learning, SDL can contribute to the development of an informed and engaged citizenry (Ponton & Carr, 2000). In Nigeria, where adult education is often linked to national development goals, SDL can play a role in fostering social change, reducing inequality, and empowering marginalized communities. However, this also requires a supportive policy environment that recognizes the value of SDL and provides the necessary resources and infrastructure to facilitate it.

Despite the concerted efforts of Nigerian government towards achieving SDL in adult education programmes in Nigeria, there are still some set-backs in the system of education in Nigeria today.

Challenges of Self-Directed Learning in Adult Education Programme in Nigeria

The challenges that SDL face in adult education programmes in Nigeria include:

Lack of access to learning resources: Many adult learners in Nigeria have limited access to necessary learning materials such as books, internet, and other educational resources (LeMire, 2024). This scarcity hinders their ability to engage effectively in self-directed learning.

Low literacy levels: Many adults entering these programmes have low literacy levels, making it difficult for them to navigate self-directed learning processes (Windisch, 2015). They may struggle with reading and comprehending materials independently, leading to frustration and disengagement.

Socio-economic barriers: Financial constraints are a significant challenge. Many adult learners are involved in jobs or occupations that demand their time and energy, leaving them with little or no time for self-directed learning (Broek et al.,

2023). Additionally, the cost of acquiring resources for learning can be prohibitive.

Cultural and social expectations: In some Nigerian communities, there are cultural and social expectations that may discourage adults, particularly women, from pursuing education independently (Jidong, 2021). These expectations may prioritize familial or societal roles over personal educational advancement.

Limited technological infrastructure: Access to technology, such as computers and internet connectivity, is limited in many parts of Nigeria (Afzal et al., 2023). This lack of technological infrastructure restricts the use of online learning platforms and resources, which are often essential for self-directed learning.

Inadequate support systems: Adult learners may lack access to mentors, tutors, or support groups that can guide and motivate them in their self-directed learning journey (Johnson et al., 2018; Boateng et al., 2022). The absence of such support can lead to feelings of isolation and discouragement.

Educational system constraints: The traditional Nigerian educational system is often rigid, with a curriculum and teaching methods that do not promote self-directed learning (Ojo et al., 2023). This system may not be flexible enough to accommodate the unique needs of adult learners.

Psychological barriers: Many adult learners may face psychological barriers such as low self-confidence, fear of failure, and anxiety about returning to education after a long hiatus (Falasca, 2011). These barriers can hinder their ability to take charge of their learning process.

Language barriers: In a multilingual country like Nigeria, language can be a barrier. Adult learners may not be proficient in the language of instruction, making it difficult for them to engage with learning materials independently (Falasca, 2011; Osam et al., 2016).

Health challenges: Health issues, which are more common among older adults, can affect their ability to engage consistently in self-directed learning (Uchino & Rook, 2020). This could include physical health challenges or mental health concerns such as stress and depression.

Time management issues: Many adult learners struggle with balancing their studies with work, family responsibilities, and other life commitments. Poor time management skills can hinder their ability to engage effectively in self-directed learning (Calonia et al., 2023).

Strategies for Promoting Self-Directed Learning in Adult Education Programmes in Nigeria

By implementing the following strategies, adult education programmes in Nigeria can create an environment that empowers learners to take control of their own education, leading to more effective and meaningful learning experiences: providing adult learners with access to libraries, online educational resources, and affordable learning materials can significantly enhance their ability to engage in self-directed learning (Haleem et al., 2022). Mobile libraries and e-learning platforms can be particularly effective in reaching remote areas; leveraging technology by introducing e-learning platforms, mobile apps, and online courses can help adult learners access a wealth of information and resources (Haleem et al., 2022). Providing training on the use of these technologies is crucial to ensure that learners can maximize their benefits; offering flexible learning schedules, including evening and weekend classes, can accommodate the busy lives of adult learners who may have work and family commitments (Topping et al., 2022). Allowing learners to progress at their own pace also supports self-directed learning; establishing mentorship programmes, study groups, and peer support networks can provide adult learners with the encouragement and guidance they need (Gehreke et al., 2024). Access to counselors and advisors who understand the unique challenges of adult education is also essential; providing foundational literacy and language support is critical for adult learners who may struggle with these basic skills (Montgomery, 2017). Tailored language programs can help learners better engage with educational content and resources; cultivating an appreciation for lifelong learning through community outreach, awareness campaigns, and success stories can inspire adults to take ownership of their education (Eden et al., 2024; Calimpos et al., 2023). Creating learning communities and forums for sharing experiences can foster this culture; developing curricula that are relevant to the learners' personal, professional, and community goals can motivate them to engage more deeply in their education (Coleman & Leider, 2013). Allowing learners to have input in their learning pathways can also increase their commitment; offering scholarships, subsidies, and financial incentives can reduce the economic burden on adult learners, enabling them to focus more on their studies (Hassan et al., 2022; Song et al., 2022). Partnerships with employers to fund education for their workers can also be beneficial; providing psychological support and confidence-building activities

can help adult learners overcome fear, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Markway & Ampel, 2018). Workshops on time management, stress reduction, and goal-setting can also empower learners to take charge of their education; engaging local communities and leaders in supporting adult education can create a more conducive environment for learning (Broek et al., 2024; Roumell & Sualehi, 2024). Community-based education programmes that integrate local knowledge and resources can be particularly effective; implementing continuous assessment and feedback on individual learning needs can help learners to monitor their progress and stay motivated (Adarkwah, 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Providing constructive feedback and recognizing achievements can boost learners' confidence and commitment; training educators in facilitating self-directed learning, especially on facilitative teaching methods that encourage self-directed learning, such as inquiry-based learning, problem-solving activities, and reflective practice (Alam, 2023; Dahal & Bhat, 2024). Teachers should act as guides rather than traditional instructors and partnering with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private companies, and international organizations can bring in additional resources, expertise, and innovative approaches to promote self-directed learning (Verger, 2019; Leal-Filho et al., 2022).

Suggestions for Improvement and the Way Forward

The following suggestions were made to promote self-directed learning in adult education programmes in Nigeria:

1. There is a need to build a strong institutional support so as to foster self-directed learning (SDL) in adult education programmes. This includes the provision of well-equipped learning centres, access to digital resources, and on-going training for adult education facilitators. Adult education institutions should also implement policies that encourage SDL, such as flexible learning schedules and personalized learning paths.
2. There is need to enhance the training and professional development of adult education facilitators. This is because; they play a crucial role in guiding adult learners through SDL processes. The training and professional development can be achieved through workshops, seminars, and certification programmes focused on SDL strategies, use of technology in education, and methods to motivate adult learners.
3. Adult education programmes need to incorporate the use of educational technologies such as learning management systems (LMS), on-line courses,

mobile learning apps, and virtual classrooms. This is because; technology can greatly enhance self-directed learning by providing learners with access to a vast array of resources, interactive learning platforms, and online communities. Therefore, providing digital literacy training to adult learners will help them effectively use these technologies for SDL.

4. As conducive learning environment is crucial for effective SDL, learning spaces need to be designed to encourage collaboration and interaction among learners, while also providing areas for independent study. This involves ensuring that adult education centres are well-resourced, safe, and accessible.
5. Adult education programmes need to implement strategies to boost learners' motivation. This can include setting clear learning objectives, providing regular feedback, and recognizing learners' achievements. Additionally, adult education facilitators should encourage adult learners to set personal learning goals, take responsibility for their learning, and reflect on their progress.
6. There is need to encourage a culture of lifelong learning for the success of SDL in adult education programmes. This can be promoted through public awareness campaigns, community outreach, and partnerships with organizations that support adult education.
7. To ensure that all adult learners participate in SDL, it is important to identify and address barriers to learning. These may include financial constraints, lack of access to learning resources, and limited time due to work or family commitments. Therefore, adult education programmes can provide financial assistance, offer flexible learning schedules, and make learning materials available in various formats (e.g., print, on-line, audio) to accommodate different learning needs.
8. There is need to establish partnerships with local communities, businesses, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to enhance SDL in adult education programmes. These partnerships can provide additional resources, mentorship opportunities, and real-world learning experiences for adult learners. Collaborating with local employers can also help align adult education programmes with the skills needed in the workforce, thereby improving employment outcomes for learners.
9. Regular assessment and feedback are important for keeping adult learners on track and motivated in their SDL journeys. Adult education programmes need to implement continuous assessment methods that are flexible and adapted to

the needs of adult learners. This could include self-assessment tools, peer reviews, and formative assessments that provide learners with constructive feedback to guide their learning.

10. Adult education stakeholders need to work together to create a supportive legal and regulatory framework that promotes adult education and SDL. Advocating for policies that support adult education and self-directed learning is crucial for long-term success. This includes lobbying for increased funding for adult education, the development of national strategies for lifelong learning, and the integration of SDL principles into the national education curriculum.
11. Adult education programmes need to encourage group projects, study circles, and peer mentoring to foster a collaborative learning environment. Peer learning and collaboration can enhance the SDL experience by allowing adult learners to share knowledge, resources, and support. This approach can help learners develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills that are essential for SDL.
12. A robust monitoring and evaluation system need to be established to assess the effectiveness of SDL initiatives in adult education programmes. This system should track learners' progress, identify areas for improvement, and measure the impact of SDL on learners' outcomes. Regular evaluations will help adult education facilitators and policymakers to make data-driven decisions to enhance the quality and effectiveness of adult education programmes.

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