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ADULT EDUCATORS' PERCEPTION AND APPLICATION OF PAULO FREIRE PROBLEM-SOLVING TECHNIQUES IN TRAINING OF ADULT LEARNERS IN AWKA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

[1]Apiti, Anthony Ahuruezenma (PhD)
aa.apiti@unizik.edu.ng
Phone:08063320590
(Corresponding Author)
&
[1]Chukwuemerie, Obiageli Chinyelu
oc.chukwuemerie@unizik.edu.ng

[1]*Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka*

Abstract

This paper determined the level of adult educators' perception and the extent of the application of the Paulo Freire problem-solving techniques in the training of adult learners in Awka-South LGA of Anambra State. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all the 89 adult educators in the 13 adult literacy centres in Awka South LGA of Anambra State. No sample size was drawn due to the manageable size of the population. Hence the total population was used for the study. Three research questions guided the study. The instrument titled "Questionnaire on the Relevance of Paulo Freire Problem Solving Techniques for Training" (QRPFPSTT) was developed by the researchers. The instrument was subjected to face validity by two experts. Cronbach Alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the instrument and it yielded an overall coefficient value 0.78. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The findings revealed that adult educators' level of understanding and application of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques is on a low level. It was found that adult educators agreed on the positive impacts of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques on critical thinking and decision-making skills of adult learners; and Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques addressed the learning needs and socio-economic challenges of adult learners to a high extent but did not equip adult learners with skills to tackle unemployment and

some economic issues. It was recommended, amongst others, that professional development programs should be provided for adult educators to further refine their skills in applying Freire's methods effectively while the need for practical engagement and participatory teaching were emphasized.

Keywords: Problem-solving Technique, Paulo Freire Problem-Solving Techniques, Training, Adult Learners.

Introduction

In Nigeria, adult education is often targeted at addressing low literacy rates, poverty alleviation, and the need for empowerment. According to National Bureau of Statistics (2023), over 35% of adults in rural areas have limited access to formal education, necessitating interventions through adult education programs. Awka South Local Government Area (LGA), a region with a mixture of urban and semi-urban communities, reflects this broader national challenge, where a significant portion of adults seeks educational opportunities to improve their economic and social standing. Adult education programs in the region are primarily aimed at literacy development, vocational training, and women's empowerment. However, the effectiveness of these programs often depends on the methodologies employed by educators. Despite the efforts of government and non-governmental organizations, adult education in Awka South LGA faces issues such as low participation rates, inadequate funding, and lack of trained facilitators (Oduaran, 2018). Adopting Freire's problem-solving techniques could address these challenges by fostering learner-centered and contextually relevant approaches. Freire's approach to education, articulated in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), challenges traditional "banking" models of education where teachers deposit information into passive learners.

In the Nigerian context, Freire's problem-solving techniques align with the principles of adult education, particularly in addressing functional literacy and skill acquisition. Akintayo and Oghenekohwo (2018) argued that adult education in Nigeria requires participatory and context-specific methodologies to overcome barriers to learning. Freire's emphasis on dialogue and critical reflection provides a framework for educators to engage learners actively, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment. He further advocated a dialogical and problem-posing method that positions learners as co-creators of knowledge. His approach is characterized by the following elements: (i) dialogue: Freire emphasizes the importance of communication and mutual respect between educators and learners. Through dialogue, adult learners share their lived experiences, enabling them to relate new knowledge to their realities (Freire, 1970); (ii) critical Consciousness (Conscientization): Freire encourages learners to critically analyze their social conditions, identifying structures of oppression and developing strategies for change (Mayo, 2019); (iii) Praxis: Freire's concept of praxis—reflection and action upon the world to transform it—is central to his pedagogy. This aligns with the goals of adult education, which often seek to empower learners to address real-life challenges (Taylor, 2021); and (iv) Relevance to Learners' Contexts: Freire's methods prioritize tailoring education to the immediate needs and realities of learners, making it particularly suitable for adult learners in diverse socio-economic settings (Akinpelu, 2020).

Studies have highlighted the transformative potential of Freirean pedagogy in promoting social change and economic empowerment (Akinpelu, 2020). For example, Okech (2019) noted that community-based adult education programs that incorporate problem-posing techniques have led to improved literacy rates and increased civic participation. Similarly, Amali, Omole and Njoku (2022) remarked that adult learners exposed to participatory methods demonstrated

enhanced problem-solving skills and greater confidence in applying their learning to real-world challenges. For the purpose of this study, the following dimensions were considered; the understanding and application of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques by adult educators; the impact of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques on the critical thinking and decision-making skills of adult learners; and the extent to which Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques address the learning needs and socio-economic challenges of adult learners (Akinpelu, 2020).

The effectiveness of any educational methodology depends significantly on educators' understanding and application of its principles. Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques involve a shift from the traditional "banking model" of education, where teachers deposit information into passive learners, to a dialogic model that encourages learners to co-create knowledge through critical reflection and active participation (Freire, 1970). In Awka South LGA, the implementation of adult education programs faces challenges such as inadequate teacher training, resource constraints, and a lack of familiarity with innovative pedagogical strategies. Educators' understanding of Freirean techniques often determines their ability to implement these strategies effectively. Studies have shown that educators equipped with critical pedagogy skills are more likely to foster an engaging and transformative learning environment (Shor, 2020; Mezirow, 2017). The study seeks to determine the extent to which adult educators in Awka South comprehend and apply Freire's problem-solving methods to empower learners.

One of the hallmarks of Freire's techniques is their capacity to enhance learners' critical thinking and decision-making skills. According to Freire (1973), education should empower learners to "read the word and the world," enabling them to understand and address their realities. By engaging with real-life challenges, adult learners are encouraged to critically analyze problems, explore alternatives, and make informed decisions. In the context of Awka South LGA, adult

learners often grapple with socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, lack of access to resources, and limited opportunities for skill development. Freire's methods, when properly implemented, can help learners develop the capacity to navigate these challenges by fostering analytical and problem-solving abilities. Research by Brookfield (2019) supports the notion that problem-based learning approaches significantly improve adults' capacity for self-directed learning and critical reflection.

Adult education in Awka South LGA is not merely an academic exercise but a practical intervention aimed at alleviating socio-economic hardships. Freire's techniques prioritize contextualized learning, where content is derived from the learners' lived experiences. This approach aligns education with the specific needs of adult learners, making it relevant and impactful (Freire, 1993). For instance, adult learners in Awka South often require education that directly addresses their vocational, financial, and social needs. Freire's techniques can facilitate this by promoting practical solutions to real-life problems, such as managing small businesses, improving agricultural practices, or advocating for community resources. By connecting learning outcomes to immediate socio-economic benefits, Freirean methods can help reduce the cycle of poverty and marginalization that many adults face.

However, the extent of their success depends on institutional support, resource availability, and the willingness of educators and learners to embrace this transformative approach. Studies, such as those by Taylor (2018) and Mayo (2019), have emphasized the importance of aligning adult education with community development to achieve sustainable impact. Freire's techniques advocate for a participatory learning process where learners are co-creators of knowledge, engaging with problems rooted in their lived experiences (Freire, 1970). Despite the global recognition of this approach, its adoption in Nigerian adult education programs is often hindered

by educators' lack of awareness, inadequate training, and resource constraints. This gap raises questions about the capacity of adult education systems in Awka South LGA to address learners' needs effectively, particularly their ability to foster critical thinking and socio-economic empowerment.

Research has consistently highlighted the transformative impact of Freire's problem-solving techniques. For example, Taylor (2018) found that learners exposed to Freirean pedagogy demonstrated significant improvements in their ability to analyze and address real-world challenges. Similarly, Brookfield (2015) emphasized that problem-solving and dialogic learning enhance learners' autonomy and critical reflection, which are essential for adult education. In contexts like Awka South LGA, where adult learners often face socio-economic difficulties, these methods can empower them to identify and implement practical solutions to improve their quality of life. In a study conducted by Oduaran (2000) in Southern Nigeria, Freire-inspired approaches were shown to improve adult learners' literacy rates and foster their participation in community development activities. It is therefore against this background that this study seeks to determine the level of adult educators' understanding and the extent of the application of the Paulo Freire problem-solving techniques in the training of adult learners in Awka-South LGA of Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

In Awka South LGA, the level of understanding and application of Freire's problem-solving techniques remain largely unexamined and underutilized. Educators often lack the training and resources to adopt innovative pedagogical strategies, relying instead on conventional methods that focus on rote learning and information transfer. This gap raises concerns about the extent to which adult learners are being empowered to navigate their realities and contribute meaningfully

to their communities. The mismatch between the needs of learners and the approaches employed in adult education programs undermines the effectiveness of these programs in fostering critical thinking, decision-making, and socio-economic empowerment. Research has demonstrated the transformative impact of Freire's techniques in various contexts. For instance, previous studies have remarked that learners exposed to problem-solving approaches exhibited significant improvements in critical thinking, self-directed learning, and the ability to address real-world challenges (Akinpelu, 2020). However, the specific application of these techniques in the Nigerian context, particularly in Awka South LGA, remains inadequately explored. This lack of empirical evidence limits the ability to assess the effectiveness of Freirean methods in addressing the unique challenges faced by adult learners in the region.

Furthermore, adult learners in Awka South face a range of socio-economic challenges, including unemployment, poverty, and limited access to resources. These challenges require an educational approach that goes beyond basic literacy to include skills for critical reflection, problem-solving, and socio-economic empowerment. Freire's methods, with their emphasis on contextualized and participatory learning, hold significant potential in addressing these needs. However, the extent to which these methods have been adapted to the local context and their impact on learners' outcomes remain unclear. It is therefore against this backdrop that the study seeks to determine the level of adult educators' perception and the extent of their application of the Paulo Freire problem-solving techniques in the training of adult learners in Awka-South LGA of Anambra State. Specifically, the study determined:

1. the level of understanding and application of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques by adult educators in Awka South LGA of Anambra State

2. the impact of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques on the critical thinking and decision-making skills of adult learners
3. the extent to which Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques address the learning needs and socio-economic challenges of adult learners in Awka South LGA

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the level of understanding and application of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques by adult educators in Awka South LGA of Anambra State?
2. How do Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques impact the critical thinking and decision-making skills of adult learners?
3. To what extent do Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques address the learning needs and socio-economic challenges of adult learners in Awka South LGA?

Methods

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all the 89 adult educators in the 13 Adult Literacy Centres in Awka South LGA of Anambra State. No sample size was drawn due to the manageable size of the population. Hence the total population was used for the study. The instrument, titled "Questionnaire on the Relevance of Paulo Freire Problem Solving Techniques for Training" (QRPFPSTT) was developed by one of the researchers. The instrument has two sections; A and B. Section A contains the demographic profile of the respondents. Section B is sub-divided into four clusters. Cluster I contains items on the understanding and application of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques by adult educators; cluster II contains items on the impact of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques on the critical thinking and decision-making skills of adult learners; and cluster III addressed items

on the extent to which Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques address the learning needs and socio-economic challenges of adult learners. The instrument was rated on a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D) and Strongly Agree (SD) with values 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

The instrument was subjected to face validity by two experts. Cronbach Alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the instrument and it yielded coefficient values 0.76, 0.87 and 0.77. Arithmetic mean was used to analyze data related to the three research questions posed and standard deviation was used to determine the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents' mean scores. The mean ratings were interpreted using criterion mean of 2.50. Mean value of 2.50 and above means that such item is agreed while mean score of below 2.50 means that such item is disagreed.

Research Question 1: What is the level of understanding and application of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques by adult educators in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State?

Table 1: Result of analysis on the level of understanding and application of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques by adult educators

S|N	Items on the level of understanding and application of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques by adult educators	X	SD	Remarks
1	I am familiar with Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques.	1.66	0.77	Low level
2	I understand the core principles of Paulo Freire's problem-solving approach.	1.95	1.06	Low level
3	I incorporate Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques into my teaching methods.	2.18	0.54	Low level
4	I encourage my adult learners to critically reflect on real-life problems as part of their learning.	2.51	0.63	High level
5	I use dialogue and discussions to solve problems with my learners, as recommended by Paulo Freire.	2.31	0.87	Low level
6	I believe that adult learners can benefit from using Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques.	3.33	0.59	High level
	Cluster Mean	**2.32**		**Low level**

Data in Table 1 reveals that items 4 and 6 with mean scores 2.51 and 3.33 were rated agreed while items 1, 2, 3 and 5 with their mean scores 1.66, 1.95, 2.18 and 2.31 were rated disagreed. The cluster mean of 2.32 summarized that adult educators' level of understanding and application of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques is on a low level. The standard deviation scores ranging from 0.54 – 1.06 means that the respondents' mean scores were closely related.

Research Question 2: How do Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques impact the critical thinking and decision-making skills of adult learners?

Table 2: Respondents' ratings on how Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques impact the critical thinking and decision-making skills of adult learners

S|N	Items on how Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques impact the critical thinking and decision-making skills of adult learners	X	SD	Remarks
7	Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques help adult learners develop better critical thinking skills.	2.81	1.14	Agree
8	Adult learners are encouraged to think critically about real-world problems through Paulo Freire's methods.	3.14	0.79	Agree
9	The use of dialogue in Paulo Freire's approach improves the decision-making abilities of adult learners.	3.17	0.87	Agree
10	Paulo Freire's techniques help adult learners analyze situations from different perspectives before making decisions.	2.85	0.92	Agree
11	Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques motivate learners to make informed decisions based on discussions and analysis.	2.65	0.68	Agree
12	My adult learners have shown improved problem-solving abilities after engaging them with Freire's methods.	3.07	0.88	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**2.95**		**Agree**

Data presented in Table 2 show that all items (7 – 12) with mean scores 2.81, 3.14, 3.17, 2.85, 2.65, and 3.07 were rated agreed. The cluster mean of 2.95 summarized that adult educators agreed on the positive impact of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques on critical thinking and decision-making skills of adult learners. The standard deviation scores ranging from 0.68 – 1.14 means that the respondents' mean scores were closely related.

Research Question 3: To what extent do Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques address the learning needs and socio-economic challenges of adult learners in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State?

Table 3: Respondents' ratings on the extent Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques address the learning needs and socio-economic challenges of adult learners

S|N	Items on the extent Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques address the learning needs and socio-economic challenges of adult learners	X	SD	Remarks
13	Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques address the specific learning needs of adult learners	3.35	0.75	**High extent**
14	These techniques help adult learners relate their learning to real-life socio-economic challenges.	3.37	0.82	**High extent**
15	Freire's approach equips adult learners with skills to tackle unemployment and other economic issues.	2.11	0.52	**Low extent**
16	The methods encourage adult learners to identify and solve problems in their communities.	2.69	0.69	**High extent**
17	Adult learners gain confidence in addressing their socio-economic problems through Freire's techniques.	2.53	0.88	**High extent**
18	Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques encourage collaboration among adult learners to address shared challenges.	2.59	0.79	**High extent**
	Cluster Mean	**2.69**		**High extent**

Data presented in Table 3 shows that all items (13 – 18), with their respective mean scores of 3.35, 3.37, 2.69, 2.53 and 2.59 were rated high extent, except item 15 with mean of 2.11 which is rated low extent. However, the cluster mean of 2.69 shows that Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques address the learning needs and socio-economic challenges of adult learners to a high extent but that it had not equipped adult learners with skills to tackle unemployment as per item 15. The standard deviation scores ranging from 0.52 – 0.88 means that the respondents' mean scores were closely related.

Discussion of Findings

The finding in research questions one revealed that adult learners' level of understanding and application of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques by adult educators is on a low level. Adult educators may lack sufficient knowledge about Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques, such as critical reflection, dialogue, and addressing real-world issues. Educators might not be familiar with the philosophical underpinnings of Freire's methods, such as empowering learners to critically analyze their socio-economic contexts. This finding is in line with the finding of Brookfield (2017) who found that many adult educators lack sufficient training in Freirean pedagogy, resulting in a superficial understanding of its principles. Educators often struggle to move beyond traditional teaching methods to the participatory, dialogical approaches central to Freire's techniques. Johnson and McCarter (2019) found that educators unfamiliar with the practical aspects of Freirean methods tend to adopt a top-down approach, limiting adult learners' ability to engage critically and apply these techniques effectively. Mezirow (2017) pointed out that adult learners accustomed to traditional, teacher-centered methods may resist the participatory and reflective approach of Freirean techniques. This resistance further limits the success of these methods, resulting in low levels of understanding and application.

The finding in research question two revealed that adult educators agreed on the positive impacts of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques on critical thinking and decision-making skills of adult learners. This finding agreed with the finding of Taylor (2017) that Freirean techniques encourage learners to question assumptions, analyze societal issues, and develop solutions based on their lived experiences. Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2018) reported that adult learners who engaged in such programs exhibited greater confidence in decision-making and applied critical thinking to resolve complex issues. More so, Akinyemi (2021) found that these

methods enhanced learners' abilities to collaborate and make strategic decisions for community improvement.

The finding in research question three revealed that Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques address the learning needs and some socio-economic challenges of adult learners to a high extent. Freire advocated for a pedagogical style that is interactive and critical rather than traditional. This means engaging learners in dialogue and encouraging them to identify problems in their lives and communities. The problem-solving techniques likely involve critical thinking and reflection to empower learners to find solutions and take action. Akinyemi and Adewale (2020) observed that Freirean techniques, when applied in community-based literacy programs in Nigeria, empowered learners to address unemployment and poverty by acquiring relevant skills. Contrarily the present study did not find that it helped adults address unemployment. This may be as a result of the lack of proper understanding and application of the strategy by adult educators. The outcome of the present study also aligns with Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2018) who reported that adult learners who engaged in Freirean-inspired education demonstrated improved financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills, directly addressing socio-economic challenges.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of the perception of adult educators on Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques reveals a compelling narrative of both potential opportunities and challenges in the training of adult learners in Awka South LGA. While the low level of understanding and application of these techniques among adult learners highlights a critical gap in their implementation, the consensus among educators on the techniques' positive impact on critical thinking and decision-making underscores their transformative potential. Furthermore, the finding

that Freire's methods effectively address the learning needs and socio-economic challenges of adult learners demonstrates their relevance in fostering empowerment and societal change.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Anambra State government should organize targeted workshops and training sessions for adult educators to deepen their understanding of Paulo Freire's problem-solving techniques and their relevance to real-life challenges.
2. Provide professional development programs for adult educators to further refine their skills in applying Freire's methods effectively, emphasizing practical engagement and participatory teaching.
3. Anambra State government should collaborate with local organizations and policymakers to integrate these methods into broader adult education initiatives aimed at community development and poverty alleviation.

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