

Engaging Adult Learners in the Learning Process Via Accelerated Learning: Andragogical Approach

Noor Hassline Binti Mohamed
Faculty of Applied Social Sciences (FASS)
Open University Malaysia (OUM)

Abstract

This study attempts to examine the effectiveness of accelerated learning with andragogical approach in engaging adult learners in the learning process. 20 learners of undergraduate psychology programmes from Open University Malaysia (OUM) are involved in the study. The approach of accelerated learning in the study incorporates the five aspects, include, create an interesting learning environment, create an emotional connection by using visuals, creatively present by using colours and sounds, activate and integrate learners through fun activity such as interactive quiz, sms mobile learning, multisensory activities such as problem solving activities, exercises and learning games, and finally, motivate learners to engage actively in learning process. The accelerated learning is implemented in face-to-face tutorial sessions and online forums. The result of the study is useful in understanding adult learners' interests in an open and distance learning institutions.

Keywords: *Accelerated learning, andragogical approach, active learning process.*

Introduction

Accelerated learning can be defined in multiple ways. Imel (2002) defines accelerated learning as a multidimensional approach to learning with the learners placed at the centre of the experience. According to Wlodkowski (2003), accelerated learning programmes are one of the fastest growing transformations in higher education. By definition, accelerated learning programmes are structured to enable adult learners take courses and earn credits in limited tutorial sessions either through online or face to face interaction. Learners who actively engage with what they are studying tend to understand more, remember more, and learn more than learners who passively receive what tutors or facilitators teach them (Park, 2003). In case of adult learners, the facilitation technique works much better than lecturing. According to Knowle (1980), androgical approach posits that adult learners bring a knowledge and skill into the learning environment. Thus, accelerated learning with andragogical approach works because learners are not starting from zero, but building on learning that has already occurred. Marque (2006) recommends the application of andragogical principles instead of the pedagogical in accelerated learning. This approach tends to encourage learners to implement, reflect, and share their learning with each other effectively.

Statement of the problem

Open and distance learning allows adult learners who have employment, family, and other responsibilities to update knowledge and skills related to their job. Moore and Kearsely (2005) indicated the number of programmes for adult learners delivered in higher education has steadily increased over the last few years. In spite of the growth in online learning and technology advancement, high dropout rates have been of concern to many organisations and higher education institutions. According to Meister (2002), 70 percent of adult learners enrolled in the programmes did not complete it. The Corporate University Xchange (2000) indicated that one of the difficult challenges of open and distance programmess is to retain learners. Adult learners' retention continues to hold the attention of adult education providers in every type of programme. In any programmes, adults are largely voluntary participants, but the student role is just one of many roles and responsibilities competing for their time and attention. In fact, personal reasons such as family problems, lack of child care, and job demands are often cited as the cause of withdrawal (Moore & Kearsely, 2005).

Several theories have been proposed to explain why students drop out. In particular, Tinto's student integration model (1993) and Bean and Metzner's student attrition model (1985) have guided dropout research studies. Tinto (1993) claimed that attrition is a result of interactions between a student and his or her educational environment during the student's stay in a program. In addition, adults learners usually have focused reasons for participating and will leave whenever they feel their goals of study have been met or if they feel the programme will not satisfy their goals. Learners who did not receive enough input and information from lecturers usually drop out from the course or programme. According to Meister (2002), personal and job factors may seem to be beyond institutional control, whereas programme satisfaction is something education institutes can improve. Based on these findings, the study is interested to explore the effective learning method as a retention strategy in how to retain learners in their learning.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of accelerated learning with andragogical approach in engaging adult learner in the learning process. This study also discusses the effective methods used in accelerated learning which can be applied to adult learners to ensure they are actively engaged in their learning. It is hoped that this study can contribute to the supporting for lifelong learning.

Literature review

Most researches on accelerated learning in higher education have focused on adult degree completion programs. The literature on teaching in accelerated learning contexts emphasises a need for active learning approaches such as group projects, creative in-class activities, and problem-solving skills. Scott (2003) investigated the attributes of high quality intensive courses by using student interviews and ethnographic observation. In his finding, Scott (2003) found that high quality accelerated subjects are delivered using active, experiential methods, in-class activities, and collaborative problem-solving rather than using more passive approaches, such as lectures. Daniel (2000) and Wlodkowski (2003) have recommended the accelerated format for mature age students in particular and they are argued that mature age students are highly motivated and tend to have previous experiences in the area of study.

Kasworm (2003) conducted a study regarding accelerated learning among students and found that those students who attained a successful adult student identity toward their learning seem to give more positive feedback about their experiences in accelerated courses. There is a growing population of adult learners around the world. The recent data from the National Centre for Education Statistics and the Department of Agriculture, which reveal that about half of the US college population is 25 years and above, and the number of part time students has also increased tremendously (Daniel, 2000). Marques and Luna (2005) found that accelerated learning are well developed among adult learners and there is a need for accelerated learning format. Accelerated learning programmes are not limited to certain areas. Wlodkowski and Kasworm (2003) aver that accelerated learning can be found in the areas of business management, teacher education and computer sciences.

The characteristics of accelerated learning and andragogy

The accelerated learning with the andragogical approach is important. The findings of researchers are well aligned to the concept of andragogy which entails the teaching adults versus pedagogy which pertains to the teaching of children (Collins, 2005; Daniel, 2000; Kasworm, 2003; Scott, 2000). Marques (2006) recommends the andragogical concept in college courses with inclusion an approach of openness to reduce teacher-student barriers, multiple feedback options, making it contemporary and reflective, encouraging student input in the course structure and creating submission options for exam and tests.

A study conducted by Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998) stressed that the andragogical approach is important to be applied for adult learners instead of pedagogical approach. Andragogical approach involves the facilitation techniques and works much better as it encourages adult learners to implement, reflect, and share their learning with each other effectively. Kasworm (2003) stated that accelerated learning with andragogical approach offers an effective combination of programme structure and learning design geared toward actions, work identity, and competence of today's adult learners. Armstrong (2007)

focused on accelerated MBA programs and examined the experiences of the employers of these MBA graduates. Armstrong (2007) found that they were satisfied with the results and felt that their employees had obtained greater knowledge and skills that prepared them for advancement in their workplace.

Another study conducted by Kasworm (2003) found that accelerated learning builds on adult identity which posits that an adult's identity hinges on a sense of mastery and self-authorship. Adult learning is experientially based and focused on solving real-life problems. Thus, this view resonates with the theory of experiential learning which contends that the learning cycle includes reflection on experience, developmental of a theoretical understanding, and then the application of that theory into a new experiential context. Swenson (2003) recommends three checkpoints for educators when engaging in accelerated learning approach, first, to create room for students to actively engage in their own learning, second, to enable ways for the student to include reflections of life and work in the process, and their, to ensure sufficient time for reflection.

Conceptual framework

Spaid and Duff (2009) identified two important advantages of students in accelerated courses, individual student development and group development. Therefore, this study utilised the model developed by Cottin and Behanmu (2007) based on experiential learning theory with the purpose to develop students' learning performance in both individual or group development (refer Figure 1).

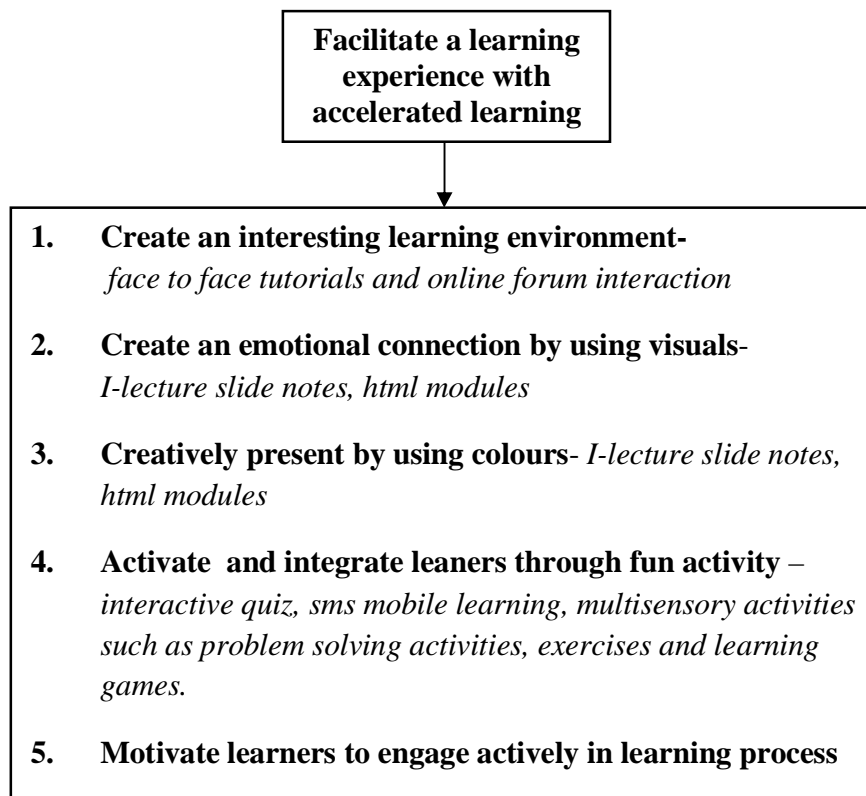


Figure 1: Model of accelerated learning

Research methodology

This study employs qualitative methods for data collection. The data collection was via interviews that evolved 20 learners from Open University Malaysia (OUM). These 20 learners were selected from 70 learners who are enrolling the Bachelor of Psychology and taken two different subjects, Introduction to Psychology and History and Philosophy of Psychology. The main objective was to explore the learning experienced by learners in their respective subjects. Four different tutors were assigned to provide learners with different methods of teaching (refer to Figure 2).

Both tutors for the subject Introduction to Psychology who involved in this study were given the instruction to provide accelerated learning with andragogical approach. They were used five methods of accelerated learning with andragogical approach in their teaching, include, create an interesting learning environment, create an emotional connection by using visuals, creatively present by using colours and sounds, activate and integrate learners through fun activity such as interactive quiz, sms mobile learning, multisensory activities such as problem solving activities, exercises and learning games, and finally, motivate learners to engage actively in learning process. For the subject of History and Philosophy of Psychology, no accelerated learning with andragogical approach provided. Both tutors were used common method of teaching for face to face and online forum interaction of their groups. Among the questions asked among accelerated learning group were learning methods that effective to them, role and effectiveness of face to face and online tutors, learning environment, and overall effectiveness of subject delivered by their respective tutors. Transcribed interview data was analysed using Nvivo programme.

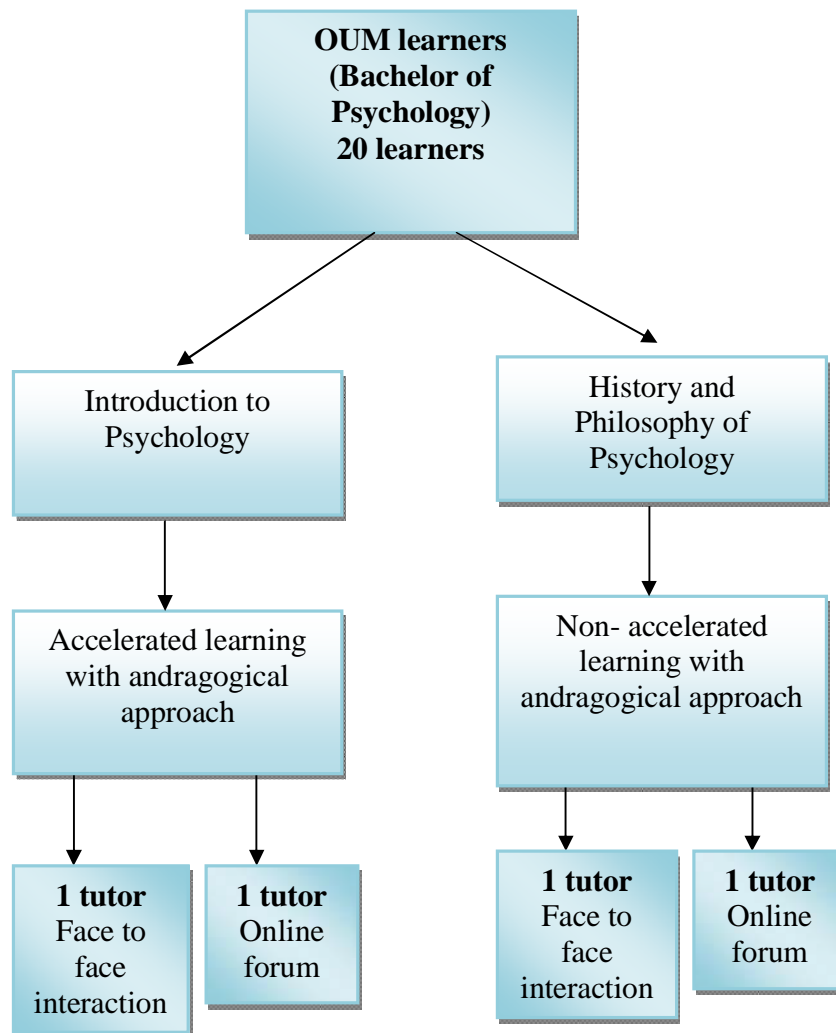


Figure 2: Accelerated and non-accelerated learning approach

Research findings

Learning approach

It was found that all the five accelerated learning with andragogical approach were mostly present in the learning process. However, analysis of findings shows that there was a room for further improvement in the effectiveness of teaching, especially, the roles of online tutors. Interviews with ten learners who had taken part in the study illustrate the learning process in their respective programme grounds. Based on the five accelerated learning with andragogical approach, it was found that learners experienced different learning methods, which depended on tutors, the learning environment and learners themselves. It was found that each learning environment, accelerated and non-accelerated differed in term of available

learning opportunity. Therefore, accelerated learning with andragogical approach were said to be more effective and conducive to learning process compared with non-accelerated learning even with andragogical approach. This is consistent with research findings by Armstrong (2007) and Kasworm (2003).

Effectiveness of accelerated learning with andragogical approach

Findings from the questionnaires showed that the accelerated learning had positive effects on learners in terms of developing their knowledge, skills, and attitude. It was also found that the accelerated learning had successfully assisted learners to engage actively in their learning process and improved their understanding on subjects. In terms of attitude, this study found that accelerated learning increased learners' self-confident and interest toward the respective subject. After the learning process, they were more confident in their subject, could understand subject better, were confident about the subject and were more interested in their learning. Learners gain confident in communicating with tutors and friends, and become more able in identifying the learning outcome. Findings from the survey indicate that, in general, the learners only moderate agree on the aspects of the application of the knowledge and skills gained through online learning because they received less of multisensory activities such as problem solving activities, exercises and learning games compared to they recieved through face to face interactions.

Contradicted to non-accelerated learning with andragogical approach, some complained that they were not given guided discussion to assess a situation and think on their feet or to relate the subject with their works, especially from online tutors. Thus, it was found that the online and face to face tutors' commitment played an important role in ensuring that learning outcome for particular subjects is shared effectively with learners.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that the accelerated learning with andragogical approach has benefited the learners and assisted them to engage actively on the learning process. This is based on the feedback from the learners regarding the effectiveness of accelerated learning they gained. Findings found that these five methods of accelerated learning with andragogical approach in include, create an interesting learning environment, create an emotional connection by using visuals, creatively present by using colours and sounds, activate and integrate leaners through fun activity such as interactive quiz, sms mobile learning, multisensory activities such as problem solving activities, exercises and learning games, and finally, motivate learners to engage actively in learning process were helped learners to actively engaged in their study. However, it was found that some learners who received accelerated learning with andragogical approach felt unsatisfied with online learners for lack activities of multisensory such as problem solving activities, exercises and learning games. This indicate that, there was a limitation for online tutors to provide learners with a lot of multisensory activities and tutors may not fully utilised the online forum for the teaching and learning process. Learners admitted that accelerated learning with andragogical approach is able to strengthen the relationship between their learning and working. They also believe that these five methods such as motivation from tutors very helpful in their learning process.

In the other hand, this study found that accelerated education is still a growing trend, and that its success rate strongly depends on the approach from tutors. Given the andragogical concept, a facilitative rather

than a teaching approach should be utilised. Furthermore, accelerated programs will require regular and close monitoring to prevent learners' drop out. However, when well-managed, these programs lead to greater gratification and a more rewarding learning experience for both learners tutors. While there are still mixed feelings about this format, it has become apparent that accelerated courses in higher education are not likely to disappear.

In conclusion, the added value of this study can be seen from its contributions to the information on adult learning methods. The implication of this study is the development of accelerated learning methods and techniques for open and distance learning universities. There are not many Malaysian studies on accelerated learning techniques and methods to be applied among adult learners. Therefore, this study is significant and can contribute to the information and knowledge on engaging adult learners in the learning process via accelerated learning.

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