ACADEMIC MANAGERS' EVALUATION OF ADULT LEARNING IN A SUMMER SCHOOL

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Abstract

Adult Learning (andragogy) is a theory that describes a set of assumptions about how adults learn. Andragogy emphasizes the value of the process of learning. It uses approaches to learning that are problem-based and collaborative rather than didactic, and also emphasizes more equality between the teacher and learner. This study evaluated adult learning in a summer school organized by the Wisconsin International University College in Accra, Ghana. In all, two hundred and fifty students participated in the summer school. To investigate adult learning in a summer school, a paper based survey consisting of one hundred and fifty (150), five-point Likert type scale was administered to 150 adult student participants in the summer school in November 2011. Ninety-four (94) out of the 150 questionnaires (evaluation sheets), were received back, thus making the sample size of 94. The survey instrument asked each participant's opinion on the content, teaching and organization of the summer school. Results showed that the organization of the summer school was perceived positively, in terms of content, teaching and organization.

Keywords: Andragogy, adult learning, evaluation, student feedback, effective teaching

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum development and obtaining student feedback in higher education contexts are linked in many ways (Patel, 2012). It is believed that curriculum development and student feedback are linked as strong catalysts in the enhancement of learning (Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008; Hubball & Burt, 2004). Obtaining student feedback and drawing meaningful conclusions from that feedback to improve teaching is a novel thing to do. However, some critics have argued that student feedback reduces student motivation and expected grades. Others feel that students do not have the knowledge and experience to provide appropriate feedback on teaching (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). To be effective, feedback needs to be clear, purposeful, meaningful, and compatible with students' prior knowledge and to provide logical connections. It also needs to prompt active information processing on the part of learners, have low task complexity, relate to specific and clear goals, and provide little threat to the person at the self level (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Moore and Kuol, (2005), effectiveness of teaching methods. Methods for obtaining feedback can be summative or formative. According to a report from the (Indiana State University, 2005; cited by ATC, 2014), summative feedback shows what has been achieved at an end point, such as the end of a course, program of study or a class. Formative feedback provides ongoing account of what is being done or achieved whether good or bad and what we need to improve before the end point is reached. Formative feedback is often more informal way to hear students' voices on their learning summative feedback.

In recent times, students' voice has gained significant prominence as a measure of quality outcome in learning and teaching (Huba, 2000). As such, various kinds of evaluation tools are used in various countries to evaluate the student experience (Shah, 2012). Evaluation based on student feedback is an important strategy for informing and refining teaching and curriculum or course design. Teachers can use a wide variety of tools to gather informal responses and feedback from students.

These may include, the muddiest point, the applications card and the minute paper (Angelo and Cross, 1993); applications card asks students to write down in as many ways as they can imagine of how to apply what they have just learned; these may occur in a number of ways as discussion board prompts, a reflective prompt in an online guide or a physical handout. Students write down the things they least understood about what they have been taught in the muddiest point. The minute paper asks students to write down their feedback on aspects of the day's session. Brookfield, (1995) used the critical incident questionnaire (CIQ), which requires students to consider important milestones in the last week's learning and teaching. The teacher

at different points can institute informal practices in the teaching session to gain feedback and make adjustments as necessary (Angelo and Cross, 1993).

The formal feedback practices which involve student evaluation of individual units of study at the end of each teaching session may involve the use of paper based or online survey to measure the quality of learning in the course or program and provide opportunities for student feedback on the teaching experience. Both formal and informal approaches to gaining student feedback provide a useful source of evidence to guide improvements and changes. They can also inspire reflective practice and contribute significantly to professional learning about one's teaching practice (Indiana State University, 2005; cited by ATC, 2014).

Scholars have argued that, "obtaining feedback on student learning from students should promote sound education principles, fulfilment of institutional missions, and effective student work, so that educational needs of students are served (Joint Committee on Students Evaluation, 2008; cited by Shah, 2012). Teacher evaluations of student learning through collecting feedback from learners should be part and parcel of the overall administrative processes and should have the goal to answer questions of decision makers who want to know whether to continue a learning program, extend it to other locations or disciplines and or to modify (Angelo and Cross, 1993).

If the program is found to be only partly effective in achieving its goals, the evaluation research is expected to identify the aspects that have been unsuccessful and recommend the kinds of changes that are needed. It is important that evaluation and feedback be part and parcel of adult learning programs. The evaluation of learning programs or curriculum targeting adult learners should embody learner and program performance information. The learner performance should be based on curriculum mastery measures (For Adult Educators, 2014).

In this paper, an account is given on evaluation of student learning in a summer school. The objectives for the summer school evaluation were to determine whether students were satisfied with:

1. The quality of teaching and training methods and how these meet the needs of participants in the summer school program

2. The depth, coverage and pace of the program

3. The quality of the summer school program and whether it met the expressed needs of participants

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evaluation for quality teaching and learning

Student evaluations of programs should promote sound education principles, fulfilment of institutional missions, and effective student work, so that educational needs of students are served (Sockalingam, 2011, Sockalingam, 2012a). Sockalingam further proposed a measurement of student satisfaction using a mission-oriented approach and presented an evaluation questionnaire to assess academic services using this approach. The underpinning idea is that satisfaction on university services should be measured against the university's mission and vision rather than a generic set of measurements on teaching and learning to provide meaningful information on and for internal processes. (Sockalingam, 2012b)

Factors influencing students' feedback in evaluations

Students' evaluations of programs can be influenced by a number of factors including course characteristics, class size, course difficulty, popularity of teacher, leniency in grading and gender (Perry, 2002). Centra (1993), shows that, some course characteristics that are not under an instructor's control can influence student ratings of instruction. Research investigating relationships between course characteristics and student ratings of instruction suggests small but noteworthy correlations between small class size and favourable student rating, between difficult subject such as mathematics and sciences and lower student rating.

The research has also shown that elective courses tend to receive slightly higher ratings than core courses, especially in cases where the core course is not related to a student's major and also that appointed instructors tend to receive more favourable ratings than graduate student instructors. According to the findings from the research, the effect of any one of those factors may not be great, but a combination could affect an instructor's mean rating significantly. Braskamp & Ory, (1994) revealed a modest correlation between expected grade and course ratings but that was accounted for by the possibility that students' who learn more tend both to get higher grades and give higher ratings.

Some researchers in the field believe that student feedback varies depending on when, during the evaluation period students' give their feedback, thinking that students may not be in a position to give feedback until they have completed all classes and assessments (Leigle & McDonald, 2005; Coffey & Gibbs 2000). Others are of the view that students' who give feedback, after sitting their final examination are influenced by the perceived level of difficulty of that examination (Pegden & Tucker, 2012). Marsh (1987) notes that student ratings are stable over time.

Marsh and Hocevar, (1991) and Krantz-Girod et al. (2004) also note that student ratings are highly reproducible for the same academic over time. Feedback from students has been found to be more positive after exams and after students' grades have been released (Leigle & McDonald, 2005). Leigle & McDonald, (2005), deduce that probably this was so because students were most stressed before examinations and that kind of stress impacted negatively on evaluations.

It was also deduced by the researchers that, student evaluations were more positive after students' knew their grades because they no longer had to fear the unknown. They concluded from the study that students who are academically less brilliant were less likely to give online feedback after their final exams. It has also been asserted that, student feedback was more positive at the end of the semester than it was early in the semester, regardless of when students sat their final exams (Coffey & Gibbs 2000).

METHODOLOGY

The study presented here focuses on collection of feedback from students who participated in a summer school regarding the quality of the program content, organization and the quality of teaching and learning. The random probability technique was used to randomly select 150 students from a list of 250 students who participated in the summer school. Students who were selected were made to complete the paper-based questionnaire modeled after the five-point Likert scale.

The setting was a summer school program for students in the Wisconsin International University College at North Legon, Accra, from June to August 2011. The aims were to understand how students' learning has been affected by the summer school? How teachers have taught to benefit learners? Which component of the summer school was most valuable to students? What course related challenges students have encountered and what suggestions students could offer for improving future organization of the summer school?

A special Academic Board meeting held on January 27, 2011 constituted a Committee to explore the feasibility of offering courses in the long vacation in the evenings for Adult Learners. The summer school idea was motivated by the need to provide an effective holiday engagement of learners and provide an alternative pathway to enable students fast track completion of required core and elective courses in three years of (supposedly three terms – regular two semesters and 'summer school') instead of four years of (regular two semesters per year). The WIUC runs two 16-week semester systems in a year in its calendar. The first semester begins August/ September running through to December. The Second Semester runs from February running through to May. The summer school in 2011 happened from June to July.

The Committees' terms of reference (TOF) were to identify courses that should be offered in the summer program and determine the structure, sequence of courses and duration of the program as well as recommending tuition and related fees to be paid by students. The committee submitted its report in March 2011 and proposed a ten-week teaching period from 6th June to 12th August. This paper provides an account of the evaluation of the summer school. Students participating in the summer school were in levels 200, 300 and 400 (i.e. years two, three and four) of their Bachelor's Degree in Business Studies. Teaching times were from 6 to 9 pm from Mondays to Fridays. The number of students' who participated in the summer school was 250.

Survey

One hundred and fifty (150) five-point Likert type scale paper-based survey was administered to adult student participants in the summer school in November 2011 (surveys were distributed at the WIUC campus to students who participated in the summer school and collected back between November 2 and November 30, 2011). The survey instrument asked each participant's opinion on the organization, depth, coverage and pace, time allowed for the program, whether the quality of the training materials was high, the quality of teaching methods, whether the course duration was adequate and orientated towards their needs and their overall satisfaction. Students were also asked to provide comments to improve future programs. The population size was two hundred and fifty participants and one hundred and fifty of them were targeted for the evaluation study.

Evaluation

Ninety-four (94) out of the 150 questionnaires (evaluation sheets), were received back, thus making the sample size of 94. Participants were asked to choose one of five answers according to the Likert Scale: score of 5 (I strongly agree with the statement); score of 4 (I agree with the statement), or 3 (average rating); score of 2 (I disagree with the statement); score of 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement). In order to cover all relevant needs and objectives for the summer school, the issues addressed by the surveys were reorganized into six major measures (objectives) as follows:

Measures

There were six major objectives. Each major objective was determined by the measures indicated below it. These were the issues that adult learners were evaluated on. The measures were determined by face, content and construct validity by staff from the Quality Assurance and Institutional Affiliations Unit (QAIAU) as well as other independent reviewers.

1. Quality of teaching methods
   - Appropriateness of training methods
   - Clarity of presentations
   - Balance between theory and practice

2. Depth, coverage and pace of the program
   - Adequate depth of subject matter coverage
   - Adequate pace
   - Adequate course duration

3. Overall quality of the summer school program
   - Training materials are of high quality
   - Time allocation to different topics were appropriate
   - Adequate references made to other relevant sources

4. Quality of Lectures
   - Lecturers were punctual
   - Lecturers complimented theory with practical illustrations better
   - Course delivery was better
   - Lecturers were conscious of the need to complete course syllabus

5. Effective Learning
   - Was able to concentrate better
   - Understood course materials better
   - Cognition was better
   - Retention was better

6. Student Satisfaction
   - There was value for tuition fee paid
   - Overall there was not much difference between evening and regular programs
   - Will recommend to colleague to take part in future programs

Data obtained from the survey (94 completed survey were returned out of the 150 questionnaire distributed) were entered into the SPSS (Statistical package for Social Sciences) and analysed accordingly.

ANALYSIS & RESULTS

Quality of teaching methods employed

Results from the study are presented in six tables that are presented below. Respondents perceptions on the quality of teaching and methods employed to teach in the summer school are Summarized in Table 1. Comments by participants refer to the relevance of the statements posed to the quality of their learning in the summer school. Responses ranged from "I strongly disagree" with a mean score of 1; "I disagree" with a mean score of 2; "average rating" with a mean score of 3; "I agree with the statement" with a mean score of 4 and "I strongly agree" with a mean score of 5.

Table 1. Perceptions of adult learners on quality of teaching methods

Quality of Teaching Methods Employed	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Appropriateness of Training Methods	94	4.7	1.5	5
Clarity of Presentations	94	4.6	1.3	5
Balance between theory and practice	94	4.5	1.4	5

As can be seen in Table 1, it is clear that the quality of the teaching and training methods of the program is perceived as appropriate. The program is considered to have a good balance of theory and practice, delivered in clear presentations.

The Depth, coverage and pace of the program

Table 2 shows that, there was adequate coverage of the subject matter. Respondents favourably perceived the course duration and pace.

Table 2. Perceptions of adult learners on the depth, coverage and page of summer school program

The depth, coverage and pace of program	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Adequate depth of subject matter coverage	94	4.4	1.3	5
Adequate pace	94	4.3	1.5	5
Adequate course duration	94	4.1	1.2	5

Overall quality of the summer school

Table 3 shows that respondents' opinions on the quality of the summer school was good, that is "agree" for the statement "adequate references made to other relevant sources" and to the statement "time allocation to different topics were appropriate". Respondents also, agreed that

training materials provided for the summer school were of good quality. On the whole, it can be said that respondents valued highly the quality of time allocated to different topics and references made to other relevant sources.

Table 3. Perceptions of adult learners on the overall quality of the summer school

Overall Quality of the summer school	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Training materials are of high quality	94	4.4	1.4	5
Time allocation to different topics were appropriate	94	4.2	1.4	5
Adequate references made to other relevant sources	94	4.3	1.6	5

Quality of lectures

Table 4 shows that, respondents agree that Lecturers were punctual, Lecturers effectively complimented theory with practical illustrations. The mode of course delivery was not satisfactory (denoted by Mean of 3.7). Respondents commented favourably on delivery skills of lecturers and showed that lecturers were concerned to complete the syllabus given the rather short duration. It appeared (from Mean of 3.7 on the feedback to course delivery) that lecturers could improve on delivery.

Table 4. Perceptions of Adult Learners on the Quality of Lectures

Quality of Lectures	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Lecturers were punctual	94	4.1	1.5	5
Lecturers complimented theory with practical illustrations better	94	4.5	1.5	5
Course delivery was better	94	3.7	1.4	5
Lecturers were conscious of the need to complete course syllabus	94	4.2	1.3	5

Effective learning

Table 5 reveals that, respondents agreed that the training was very useful, favourably responding to statements such as "was able to learn better" and "understood course materials better" "Cognition was better" and "retention was better" with a mean greater or equal to 4.4. The summer school thus informed respondents' learning.

Table 5. Perceptions of Adult Learners on the Quality and Effectiveness of their Learning

Effective Learning	Sample size	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Was able to concentrate better	94	4.8	1.5	5
Understood course materials better	94	4.6	1.5	5
Cognition was better	94	4.5	1.3	5
Retention was better	94	4.4	1.2	5

Student Satisfaction

Table 6, shows that, respondents felt that the tuition fees paid was reasonable and would consider participating again if the summer school was reorganized in a future date. Over 90 % of participants said they would recommend to their colleagues to participate in future summer school programs. Also a significant proportion of respondents thought that, there was not much difference between the summer school and the regular semester teaching during the year.

Table 6. Perceptions of Adult Learners on their satisfaction with the summer school

Student Satisfaction	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
There was value for tuition fees paid	94	4.5	1.6	5
Not much difference between evening and regular program	94	4.6	1.5	5
Will recommend to colleagues to take part in future programs	94	4.9	0.29	1

Discussion

This organization of the summer school was the first of its kind in the history of the WIUC. The purpose was to provide an effective holiday engagement of learners and provide an alternative pathway to enable students' fast track completion of their undergraduate studies. As noted by (Sockalingam, 2011, Sockalingam, 2012a) the collection of student feedback in this study sought to promote sound education principles, fulfilment of institutional missions, and effective student work, so that educational needs of students would be served.

In line with Sockalingam (2012b), students' satisfaction on a university service (provision of summer engagement for effective student learning) was measured against the university's vision (i.e. to provide an opportunity for young men and women from Ghana as well as the rest of Africa to acquire the knowledge and skills relevant to successful careers and fulfilment in an increasingly globalizing and competitive world) and its mission (i.e. to train and develop skilful and competent professionals, and ensure that its graduates gain the right knowledge and

expertise required for the management of modern global organizations and provide a broad-based adult and continuing education for the knowledge society in Ghana and Africa).

Unlike the studies by Perry, Centra, and Braskamp & Ory (Perry, 2002; Centra, 1993; Braskamp & Ory, 1994;) this study did not investigate the relationships between the specific course characteristics and student ratings of instruction used by those studies. Though students feedback were gathered at the end of the program delivery, this study differed from the studies by (Leigle & McDonald, 2005; Coffey & Gibbs 2000; Marsh and Hocevar, 1991; and Krantz-Girod et al. 2004); in that it did not examined the effect of time and period of evaluation on students' feedback.

To recap the aims of study were to understand how students' learning has been affected by the summer school. How teachers have taught to benefit learners. Which component of the summer school was most valuable to students. What course related challenges students have encountered and what suggestions students could offer for improving future organization of the summer school. The findings indicate that quality of the teaching and teaching methods adopted were appropriate. The program was considered to have had a good balance of theory and practice, delivered in clear presentations. Also that the quality of materials and time allocated to different topics and references made to other relevant sources were favourable. The mode of course delivery, nonetheless, was not satisfactory (denoted by Mean 3.7). However, respondents commented favourably on delivery skills of lecturers and showed that lecturers' were concerned to complete the syllabus given the rather short duration. Respondents agreed that the summer school was very useful, agreeing that they learned, understood course materials and retained what was taught improving cognition of principles taught them. On tuition, respondents felt that fees paid was fair and committed to participate in future "summer schools", nearly 90 % of them saying they would recommend to their colleagues to participate in future summer school program.

Putting it all together, the following suggestions are noteworthy to help achieve the stated vision and mission statements and serve as guide to other institutions with similar goals and experiences.

a. Enable past, present and future participants in the summer school to connect with one another for the purpose of sharing knowledge and experiences

b. Expand the recruitment drive of the summer school to reach out to more students

c. Improve delivery modes of teaching and learning to make classes more interactive

Enabling Program Participants to Connect

Creating opportunities for past, present and future participants in the summer school to connect with one another for the purpose of sharing knowledge and experience could be accomplished through lectures, summer informal collaborations or as a kind of "secondary" or "peer or faculty" mentoring relationship. The University College could facilitate meetings throughout the year that gather highly motivated and skilled past participants in the summer school some of whom may be still pursuing graduate and undergraduate studies at the University College or from nearby institutions of higher learning in Ghana. It might be good to carefully plan the connecting processes to have greater control and regulation of the processes possibly to link mentoring with undergraduate research projects. Possibly a brief handbook and guidelines for mentors and possibly guidelines or "contracts" written up between mentors and students to reinforce the responsibilities of each person, student and mentor could work effectively.

Expanding the Summer School Program

Respondents' views from the study suggest that they would recommend to their friends meaning that they would like to see the summer school program expand, so that it would be able to reach larger numbers of eligible students on admission in the University College. Enthusiasm for the summer school graduate school could vanish if not adequately supported and encouraged. The WIUC has a great diversity of students. International students and local students and students from lower and higher income backgrounds. These diversities reflect on students' abilities to pay fees during the regular calendar year and in the summer school period. Most often the most academically talented students are the ones with less ability to pay.

Organization of the summer school should not ignore these students if the stated vision and mission goals are to be achieved. It is important to include them. Besides, they will have a positive influence on others who are may be less talented. Suggestions for expanding the summer school could involve creating opportunities for students to connect, discuss views and exchange ideas. Having a sense of community will be a brilliant idea possibly, an official discussion group online or social networking opportunity. During the 2011 summer school, students paid between 150 – 300 Ghana Cedis (approximately the equivalent of US$ 100-200 then). The program will make a substantial impact on students and their parents by minimizing the financial pressure that some students and their families currently experience; cutting down on fees and expecting to enrol more students by actively implementing some of the suggestions put forth in this discussion.

Making effective teaching and learning possible

Implementing a short orientation and or mentoring curriculum for faculty and mentors could enhance delivery methods for the summer school. The summer school could benefit from a standard curriculum or set of introductory resources that could be made available to lecturers. The organizing team could support lecturers to develop resources especially lecturers who may be new to the task of teaching in the summer school. Also providing adequate support in terms of audio-visuals and projection facilities will help. It should help to beef up the support of effective online presence in the "summer schools". Opportunities should be provided for students and lecturers to connect with one another and to share the lessons and insights provided by the teaching and learning experience.

The organizing team may wish to consider ways to further strengthen and sustain connections among program participants and the lecturers. For example, networks of students and lecturers can be established on a web-based communication for a to further pursue discussions of teaching and learning beyond the confines of the summer school premises? Expanded means for social communication and information exchange among participating students could serve as tools for connecting learners with help to ensure that social networks are reinforced and strengthened. Simple online networking would be a great catalyst in helping past, current and future participants and their instructors to be more actively aware of themselves and of resources available to them to promote effective student learning.

CONCLUSION

Feedback collected from participants of the summer school organized from June to August in 2011 by the WIUC indicates that the summer school produced a variety of positive outcomes for participating students. These outcomes include improving students' learning through enhancing cognition, retention and understanding of concepts and principles taught. Students' feedback also reveals that lecturers were effective in their teaching of difficult concepts and as students, have benefited from their teachings. The conducive atmosphere promoted high concentration and cognition, the quality of learning materials provided, resulted in high retention of facts, concepts and principles taught. Students confirmed that these were the most important components of the summer school to them. Delivery methods of the program was not so satisfactory to learners, however learners were content with the skills of lecturers and showed that lecturers' were committed to their teaching.

To improve future organization of the summer school, it is suggested that instructors look for vital information and supporting resources, such as supportive and inspiring community of peers, mentors, and understanding required to successfully negotiate effective teaching and

learning by instructors that are new to the role of teaching in a summer school. Also by building upon the achievement of past summer school programs and communicating vital information about the norms, expectations, and social conventions of 'summer school"; sustaining a supportive network of peers and associates; and positively affecting participating students' career aspirations and preparedness for entry to the world of work.

Although the program has encountered some modest challenges in the mode of delivery, garnering more recognition from top management and gaining the recognition and support of the larger student body will make the summer school successful in providing a unique set of opportunities to students and to advance the vision and mission of the Wisconsin International University College. It is suggested that future "summer schools" should prepare prospective learners with information about "what to expect" from the program. It should also prepare them with information about what to expect from the real world outside the classroom, and prepare them with the knowledge, tools and skills needed to successfully navigate through life course as students. The summer school should provide a supportive and inspiring community of peers, instructors, mentors and staff to enhance students' confidence about their abilities and skills.

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