

ASSESSMENT PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE RURAL COMMUNITY LITERACY BLENDED E-LEARNING OUTCOMES

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Abstract

Education is a vital part of every sphere of life. Without education nothing can be realised. Education helps to build relationships. Education starts with literacy including numeracy. Education is the process of holistic development of the human capital. Thus, getting educated through whatever mode requires that knowledge and skills be acquired. As part of human capital development, rural community literacy (including numeracy) programme assists rural adult population to acquire knowledge and skills to fit into the world of work and so make meaningful contribution to society. This may be done through blended (in-person and e-learning) mode. Literacy programme prepares the rural adult community members for small scale entrepreneurship for self-reliance and meaningful contribution to community and national development. Literacy education helps the unlettered rural adult to interact with other people profitably and also to transact business without much communication and computing constraints. In facilitating learning, learning must be seen to have actually taken place. Assessment is the means through which this is done. There are specific assessment practices that will promote community blended literacy programme. There are three domains of learning: cognitive (intellect), the affective (soft skills) and psycho-productive (the application) skills. These domains must be meaningful embedded in any learning situation. Consequently, any useful assessment practice must take cognisance of the three domains to engender effective learning. Therefore, this paper discussed assessment practices that can engender learning in in blended literacy and numeracy: portfolio assessment, peer-assessment which makes learners to learn together, self-assessment and teacher-guided peer-assessment. The paper proposed that when concurrent assessment practices are integrated into the modified blended community learning process, they would effectively engender learning outcomes.

Key words: Assessment Practices, Portfolio Assessment, e-learning modes, guided peer-assessment, learning outcomes

Introduction

Education is a vital part of every sphere of life. Without education nothing meaningful can be realised in the 21st century global village, we are in. Education helps to build relationships. Education starts with literacy which includes numeracy. Thus, community development is a form of education, in the sense that it is a learning process. However, there is the component of community development that is education in itself: that is the literacy (including numeracy component) programme, whereby rural folks are taught how to read, write and do some elementary mathematics (arithmetic). These elements of literacy were hitherto termed as the three R's: read, (w)rite and (a)rithmetic. The purpose of the rural community development literacy [and numeracy] purpose is to assist the rural populace to acquire knowledge and skills in literacy and numeracy to ensure that they are literate both in literacy and numeracy to the extent that they can read and communicate at least in a language and are able to buy and sell without being cheated because of inability to do simple calculation. Thus, the effectiveness of this education component of community development cannot be determined without some measure of assessment. Effectiveness of a programme is measured not only at its completion but also throughout its implementation process, to ensure that any deviation from plan is ameliorated to keep it on track to achieving its set objectives.

Of course, the basis for assessment of any programme is the objectives for which the programme was established. In educational

programmes, there are expected learning outcomes to be attained by the learners under such programmes. There are different assessment practices and some are specifically suited to certain purpose or programme. The mode of facilitating learning also lends itself to specific assessment practices. Different assessment practices are suitable for different levels of learning and different groups of learners too. Just as different methods are used to facilitate learning at the different tiers of education, so also are assessment practices. In other words, the methods of assessment or assessment practices at the nursery/primary level may not hold water at the secondary level, while those used at the tertiary are likely to be slightly, if not dramatically, different from the ones at the previous levels. The type of assessment that may be used in the non-formal setting of education will be quite different from what obtains at the formal level. Even, if the same modes are employed they must be different in context and indeed in content. Therefore, in assessing community development education component, we have to critically assess their purpose or objectives for which they set out to achieve, laid side by side with the milestones at which they are expected to be achieved as the programme progresses as well as the overall goal that the programme is envisaged to accomplish while it was being conceived, planned and being executed.

Community literacy [which often includes numeracy] programme should not be one-off project but must be increasingly sustainable; hence it becomes a programme rather a project. Assessment practice that suits each project is best for it. Onuka (2021) observed that evaluation, of which assessment is a component, is a management tool used to carry out the assessment of cause and effect in different fields of human endeavour: in Medicine, in agriculture, in education and in all other fields including the field development studies of which community development and human development are components. We can emphatically submit that the development of a community apart from its human component is an exercise in futility. This is why literacy [including numeracy] education is part and parcel of community development, and in fact, community development should begin from

human development, otherwise all efforts aimed at community development becomes a futile undertaking (as community members need to be both literate and numerate) to participate meaningfully because literacy is the tool for effective communication, while numeracy is the language of measure (Umoru-Onuka, 2001a), and the acquisition of both knowledge and skills in the two areas of human development will also tantamount to ability to participate effectively in the broader community development spectrum. Thus, the main import of this study is proposing the use of concurrent assessment practices model to promote learning outcomes in a suggested modified (blended) synchronous e-Learning rural community literacy development programmes. This study was informed by the constructivist theory of learning, which presupposes that human learn by internally constructing meaning as opposed to acquiring it (Jonassen, 1991) and that individual and environmental variables are pivotal to the constructivists' view of learning (Ertner and Newby, 1993). In other learning is great influenced by the context in which it is being undertaking. The two learning enhancers (modified blended community literacy adult literacy programme and concurrent assessment practices here proposed are hinged squarely on the fact that learning can be enhanced by the learner and their environment since the learners should not be passive participants. It is that both the modified synchronous learning and concurrent assessment practices model would cause learners to actively participate in the learning facilitation process to engender the required learning outcomes.

Community Development

According to Green and Haines (2008), community development implies all plans and efforts geared towards building the assets of a community in order to increase the capacity of residents to improve their standard of living. Community asset, they posited includes social, human, political, financial and environmental, among others. Thus, the human capital or asset is the most potent of all of them because they are the ones that mobilise other resources for all types of development, which are all for their

own benefit as well. This is why Onuka (2004) concluded that development is undertaken by human for the benefit of human. This submission buttresses the important role of the human in the development process including community development. If community development involves mobilising community members for collective project undertaking that would enhance their standard of living, then the beginning point should be literacy including numeracy education for an otherwise unlettered humans to understand the implication of community development to enable them to comprehend issues involved in community development for them to key into it as well as for their effective mobilisation for the accomplishment of the desired goal of community development.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (not dated) submits that community development is the process by which a community is supported by development agencies to identify and collectively act on important developmental issues to that are common to them and for their own benefit. Community development empowers community members to enable create them create stronger and more connected relationship for the members' common good. UNESCO (n.d.) also defines community development as that process which brings together members of a particular community in order to collectively identify common problems and decide on how to corporately find solutions to them. It can be inferred from these submissions on the import of community development that education is an integral part of community development. In other words, the literacy [plus numeracy] programme is a facet of the multifaceted or the collage that is referred to as community development. In fact, education can be said to be its foundation because it provides the basis for community members to be on the same page of understanding the developmental issues among themselves and with development partners.

Assessment and Assessment Practices

Assessment (evaluation), according to Thorndike (1997), is of two main types: assessment for learning (formative evaluation)

and assessment of learning (summative evaluation). The <https://www.westminster.edu> about posits that assessment is a systematic way of making inferences on learning and the development of the learner. In other words, it is a process through which one defines, selects, designs, collects, analyses, interprets and uses information to improve learners' learning capacity and development. It consists of variety of tools or techniques or modes through which how much learning is taking place in the learner and how to improve their learning and capacity that will culminate in their personal capacity building is determined. Enhancing the learning outcomes of the literacy and numeracy capacity-development programme of the rural community adult member for community development, implies that there must be a way to determine how much they are getting on with the capacity building project. The most potent way of doing so is by way of assessment. However, there are various forms of assessment practices, some suitable for certain purposes only. For instance, in assessing learning achievement (cognitive), tests are the most suitable assessment modes to measure that, whereas certain behaviours in the affective domain are better measured through observation while most behaviours in the psycho-productive domain are better measured through practical tests and/or observation. Other scales used to measure other attributes in the affective domain include attitude scales, rating scales, personality tests, among others, depending on what the assessment is all about. Mode of teaching and learning also calls for commensurate modes of assessment. In community literacy and numeracy development project, the mode of teaching and learning will have to be blended especially in this digital and post-COVID era: in-person and virtual, possibly through a centralised community viewing centre with an auxiliary facilitator in place to help to ensure that appropriate learning takes place. The digital learning to be adapted should be a modified synchronous learning so that the on-site auxiliary facilitator will be able to help the adult learner to learn to understand faster what is intended for them to learn. Thus, in such a modified blended learning atmosphere, the

auxiliary facilitator is present when the synchronous digital class is on, do some further explanations afterwards and then help them to restate what they have learnt and equally ask them to take home some assignments and put it together on paper to ensure retention of what they have learnt. In this discourse, though there are various practices of assessment, emphasis will be more on those that are most useful for promoting community adult literacy and numeracy development. These are herein termed concurrent community adult literacy and numeracy capacity development assessment (modified assessment for learning) practices. This is a developed literacy and numeracy capacity (an equivalence of assessment for learning) assessment modes to determine how much is being learnt by way of hands-on and portfolio assessment. This is in tandem with what is done in South Korea where no formal examination takes place at the first two tiers of education (Onuka, 2021). According to Oshin (2017), concurrent assessment practices (assessment for learning) include questioning, field work, discussion, assignments, projects, direct on-site observation, interview, quizzes, hands-on practical, self- cum peer-assessment, among others. In these forms of assessment, the learner is simultaneously involved in learning and in the assessment of how much they are learning, and such assessment practices simultaneously promote learning and the resultant learning outcomes.

ODEL and Community Development

Onuka (2015) posits that ODL has gravitated from being a 'second chance' education provider to becoming a dual chance education provider to both first chance and second chance education seeking people. In fact, in Nigeria, with the advent of National Open University and numerous University-based Open Distance Learning Institutes/Centres, education by ODeL has become purpose-dual provision. By this development, this mode is no longer an only a 'second chance' education provision issue, but it has also become a primary higher education provision outfit. Umoru-Onuka (2001b) believes education by distance learning is not new and it is not also consign only to

higher education. He recalled that there were such institutions offering education at the secondary and tertiary education like School of Careers, Wosley Hall and Exam Success Correspondence college who were responsible for providing second chance education by open/distance learning mode in the 1970's, from which many who did not have the opportunity of attending formal secondary education undertook their studies and wrote certificate examinations as well as passed their general certificate of education (GCE) examinations, and equally gained admission to tertiary institutions later on. Thus, in the context of this paper, ODeL learning outcomes refers to the outcomes in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of literacy that include numeracy development programmes in the rural communities. The best mode to employ in facilitating community literacy and numeracy development is the modified blended synchronous mode since though, the facilitator will be online teaching, the adult learners and the auxiliary facilitator will be on-site with the adult learners to assist in giving further explanation to them since most of these adult learners may not able to possess real electronic device like television sets, relevant hand devices and of course no power generating sets to constantly power those devices to enable them learn asynchronously. Onuka (2015) also observes that ODL, though has been in existence for secondary and tertiary education since the last millennium, but it has taken a new form with advent of the new technologies and also because of increasing demand for access to tertiary educational institutions. The technologies aspect can be applied to any area of learning: literacy and numeracy inclusive. At least with rural electrification projects and/or use of generating set and provision of a centrally located television viewing centre or computer-assisted modified synchronous teaching and learning, ODeL can be applied to community development literacy and numeracy programme.

Community Development – Literacy and Numeracy Programme

Literacy programme is often meant to provide some elementary or rudimentary education to

the populace to enable them fit into being able to contribute to community development meaningfully. Such programme also enables them to be self-reliant to some extent. It is equally multifarious in nature. It can be in learning to read and write as well as obtaining knowledge and skills in arithmetic in one's own language or it could be doing so in the nationally designated official language or a blend of the two. National Literacy Trust (n.d.) defines literacy as ability to read and write in such a way to enable one communicate effectively by speaking, listening and responding appropriately. It added that literacy may include knowledge and skills in numeracy. UNESCO (n.d.) posits that it is the 'ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute (numeracy), using printed and written materials associated varying contexts'. This definition by UNESCO very amply fits our context of literacy development programme as a component of community development effort. Literacy programme is intended to develop the human capacity of the community members so that they can take ownership of the development of their community by actively participating in deciding the nature of development project that will solve their acute challenge, design, plan and execute, monitor and evaluate it for sustainability. The foregoing, can only be truly attained if the members' level of literacy and numeracy is developed first. Otherwise their participation in community development project would be a phantom mirage.

Literacy including numeracy is the starting point for the human development. Through community literacy development, more community members become educated, self-reliant and can contribute better to other facets of community development. Understanding the nitty-gritty of community development by community members is largely hinged on their degree of enlightenment given birth to by literacy programme. With more literate members of the community, it is easier to get them to understand the rationale for community development and indeed the need for community development. Consequently, agenda for community development can easily be set and understood and be readily executed. Community participation is much more

engendered when the community members are literate in literacy and numeracy. However, the level of literacy acquisition and how much it to further engender its acquisition are both consequent upon assessment of the literacy programme products and outcome as long as the appropriate assessment practices are employed.

The Assessment Practices (Model) For Promoting Effective Community Adult Literacy Outcomes

The usual assessment modes may not be ideal for assessing the adult learner. Thus, a special or creatively devised assessment practice would be suitable for the exercise. These assessment practices would involve the adult learner in determining and executing the assessment that will promote their literacy education and that will help them. These assessment practices will include those that could easily be used to assess soft skills which are the real work skills in the current knowledge economy. Soft skills consist of communication, team work, interpersonal relationship, networking as well as collaborative skills, among others, in the adult learners (Branch-Muller, Stang and Rathi, 2023). These are the skills in demand in terms of the world of work in the modern parlance. The most likely workable assessment practices in a community development adult learning programme are what could be termed as concurrent assessment practices. These include such assessment modes as: questioning – here the facilitator, having been with them during the synchronous digital learning session asks series of questions that may clear doubts and lack of understanding of the taught content and also context, to help the learners to further grasp the taught content.

Therefore, in this discourse, the following concurrent assessment practices are proposed to have the potential capacity of promoting the effectiveness of community literacy development programme and the subsequent learning outcomes.

1. The modified peer-assessment by group of adult learners (2-5 persons) using a guide prepared by the auxiliary on-site facilitator to help them to critically

discuss the work of each person in the group with the intent of remediating any shortcoming in their individual work. It would help to put adult learners on their toe and on the learning track. They then report the product of the assessment of



each work to the facilitator who will ensure that the correct assessment is given at the end and the appropriate remediation is done in such a manner that learning is thereby enhanced.

The picture above is an example of peer-assessment that could result in peer learning during the process of such an exercise

2. The portfolio form of assessment would be helpful in the psycho-productive aspect of the learning, a situation where each is encouraged to cumulate the best of their practical products in the literacy sessions and they then have aggregated to determine the quality of such products and also discussed in groups as well as have the outcome of the exercise reported

in a whole class setting so that they could learn from each other as well as one another and the faster ones are encouraged to help other learners to learn better and equally faster. Learners examine one another's portfolio of assessment work for their comments for improvement where necessary.



An example of portfolio assessment in action

3. Discussion: Here the auxiliary facilitator organises the learners for discussion on what is taught by guiding not leading as the learners by themselves appoint a discussion coordinator from among the learners. With some questions on the taught content to guide the discussion, they will discuss each of the questions relative to the taught content during the digital session to ensure that they have learned something. The auxiliary facilitator should be in position to tell if they really have learnt judging from the way they had

discussed, then s/he gives feedback and immediate remediation to make them ready for the next learning session. They could be taken to the field for practical work, in during which practical demonstration of what they have learned during the facilitation sessions, while the auxiliary facilitator takes note of how each person was able to demonstrate their prowess, gives feedback and remediation simultaneously so that people can improve in their learning.

4. Assignments: in this case, assignments are given to the community adult learners and further explained by the on-site facilitator who is more or less a tutorial assistant, who also goes through the assessment and help the learners with remediation where and when necessary, all, in an effort to ensure that community members' literacy acumen is increasingly improved. The assignments are then corporately reviewed and feedback and necessary remediation is then suggested in order to help the learners to learn better by doing it by themselves. Of course, this is a faster and better way of learning (Durowoju and Onuka, 2013). It encourages individual independent learning.
5. Projects: this is a situation when the learners are given specific creative practical assignment regarding learning domain that could demonstrate their psychomotor prowess with regard to the literacy programme: perhaps drawing, computation, speech, writing, etc that help them exhibit the fact that they have acquired some measure of practical skills as well as soft skills in the course of the programme as it is on-going. It is usually individual specific and helps independent learning
6. Direct on-site observation: as the programme is ongoing, the tutorial assist (the on-site facilitator) observes how the learners are learning the content on which learning is being facilitated.
7. Interview: interview may also be randomly conducted by the on-site facilitator to ascertain that learning is really taking place as the programme progresses to determine the necessary remediation to give in order to further engender learning in these adult learners. It is very relevant in assessing certain aspects of the psychomotor and affective domains
8. Quizzes are administered on the learners to make them always prepared to learn and to engender learning as well since such exercise is followed by remediation as soon as practicable. It helps to remediate learning deficiency as the learning is on-going
9. Hands-on practical done as an on-site assignment by them to help them to practise what has been taught to them and to measure how much progress they are making with regard to the current content of facilitation.
10. Another form of concurrent assessment is self- cum peer-assessment in which learner can undertake assessment of themselves as well as equally be involve in peer-assessment [whereby they peer-review their work] almost simultaneously with the intent of discovering their areas of weakness in order to ameliorate their shortcomings through individual self-assessment and also through peer-assessment in order to enhance their individual rate of learning and by extension helping each other and one another to accelerate their learning achievement and outcomes in the affective and psychomotor domains too.

Conclusion

The paper has highlighted how concurrent assessment practices in an Open Distance and e-Learning in community literacy development programme meant to engender the capacity of the unlettered adult community can be used to promote learning outcomes. The paper noted that the current quest for transformation of learning mode to digital facilitation mode, though well-deserved is constraint by the capacity of the rural community dwellers to access some modern technology facilities including energy (electricity or power generating set), communication hand devices, television sets and projects to attend asynchronous learning sessions. And as such it suggested a blended synchronous with in-person [on-site] session with an auxiliary facilitator to assist the learners with further learning attainment. It equally posited that the literacy programme best fits into a modified assessment for learning which is developmental in nature, which it termed as concurrent assessment practices because they are done concurrently with the learning facilitation and it keeps learning on tract because the learner will be busy with learning most of their spare time.

Suggestions

The suggested concurrent assessment practices and Blended modified synchronous Learning Delivery Mode:

1. Modified portfolio assessment; quizzes; project and assignment; off-class demonstration of what was learned. These also include Question-propelled group discussion; peer- and group assessment practices; among many other forms. These concurrent assessment practices are likely to keep the learner and the facilitator busy as well. They could also change the course of facilitation, once the feedback points to that direction. This is because assessment helps to evaluate the facilitation and learning process for improved learning outcomes in all the learning domains as it is well known that the more one practices the more dexterous they become in what they do or learn.
2. It is also imperative that operators of ODeL nationwide adopt the modified and blended (synchronous and in-person) learning mode with concurrent assessment practices model for improved learning outcomes in community literacy development programme in Nigeria and in other developing countries.
3. That the adoption of concurrent assessment practices will enhance the sustainability of the learning outcomes in blended ODeL community literacy programmes for wider community development. The study proposed the concept of concurrent assessment practices model for a suggested blended synchronous community literacy development programme, on which a theory and empirical studies can be built for the validation of the proposed concurrent assessment practices and the modified (blended) synchronous e-learning community literacy development for sustainable learning outcomes.

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