Adult Learners' Perception of Adult Functional Literacy Curriculum (AFLC) in Kenya
Susan Wambui Mukiri*, Francis Chisikwa Indoshi**, Lucas A. Othuon***

Abstract
The purpose of this study was to determine adult learners' perception of AFLC and the reasons for their perception. The study employed the correlation design and was conducted in Kisumu East District in Kenya. The population comprised of 472 adult learners. A sample of 156 adult learners was selected through stratified random sampling. Data was collected through a questionnaire and an interview schedule and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings indicated that adult learners had positive perception towards AFLC and negative perception towards individualized instruction and the lecture method. Males had a stronger perception of the teaching methods than the females. Benefits accruing from AFLC such as knowing how to read and write and performing arithmetic were cited as reasons for positive perception of AFLC. Shortage of facilitators and inappropriate learning environment were reasons cited for negative perception of the individualized instruction and the lecture method. Based on the results, it is advisable that appropriate measures be taken to help learners improve their perception towards the teaching methods of AFLC as this may translate to improved participation.

Key Words: Adult Learners' Perception, Adult Functional Literacy Curriculum.

Introduction
When Kenya attained political independence in 1963, ignorance, poverty and disease were identified as the major challenges of the new nation. In particular illiteracy was widespread. The 1969 population census showed that the number of children between the age of 10 and 14 who had never attended school had increased significantly. In the age of 55 and over, as many as 74.5% of males and 93% of females had never attended school (Eshiwani, 1993).

Adult education was seen as a panacea to problems of development. It was believed to contribute to political development by creating an informed and participant citizenry and to social development by equipping people for new roles associated with expanding range of occupations. The Functional Literacy Approach (FLA) was introduced with the help of UNESCO in 1972. The FLA combines literacy learning and acquisition of other practical skills instead of the traditional alphabet learning (Chege & Sifuna, 2006).

Even with these efforts illiteracy continued to plague the country. This is confirmed by the recommendations of the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies of 1976 (Gachathi Committee) which recommended that measures be taken towards the achievement of universal literacy in the country and expressed the need to treat literacy as a serious national objective, based on a strong political will, along massive mobilization of people and funds and through a strengthened Board of Adult Education (Republic of Kenya, 1976).

Despite all the efforts put to improve participation in adult literacy programmes the enrolment rates have continued to fall. In the year 1979, the number of adults who enrolled in AFLP were 415,074 but by 2003 the number had dropped to 93,000 (UNESCO, 2003). According to the Kenya National Literacy Survey (KNLS) carried out in 2006, at least 7.8 million Kenyans or 38% of the population were illiterate. This is a pointer that something ought to be done quickly to improve the programmes so that they can inspire adults to register...
(UNESCO, 2007). Studies have been done to establish factors that influence adult learners' participation in AFLC but none has looked at the influence of adult learners' background towards their perception of AFLC. Further, it is important to establish whether there is a significant difference in perception across gender and location as this could explain why there are differences in participation across gender and location.

In a study entitled 'Perceived Influence of Duration of Literacy on Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Balyesa and Imo States of Nigeria', Zuofa and Igbo (2009) found out that the perception of the rural women on the influence of literacy education on the economic empowerment was positive irrespective of the period of participation. They observed that the perceptions of individuals and feelings towards an educational programme and learning are very crucial factors that influence participation in the learning activity. This may determine how such participants or learners must have benefited from the programme.

It is for the above reason that AFLC should be organized in a way that recognizes the principles of adult learning. Brookfield (1986) identifies four principles of adult learning; that adults are autonomous and self-directed, adults' experiences are a rich resource for learning, adults are aware of specific learning needs generated by real life tasks or problems and that adults are competency-based learners in that they wish to apply newly acquired skills or knowledge to the immediate circumstances. Once the principles of adult learning are adhered to, learners develop positive attitudes towards the adult education programme and vice versa.

Murray et. al. (2007) define positive perceptions as those aspects of the course itself that participants viewed positively as helpful to their learning for example good teaching practices or the one to one learning opportunities that were available. The study revealed that 90% of the participants (20 out of 22) specifically talked at length about good teaching as positive. Some participants talked at length about their tutors' patience, support, sympathy, and ability to respond to the students' learning styles. Among the negative perceptions included the use of computers where 1 out of the 22 respondents found computers a little outdated, another felt that he had taken the wrong course while another one was unhappy with the shift from individual work to group work.

Participants in the 'Functional Literacy Programme in Isoya Rural Development Programme in Nigeria' felt that the programme had helped them acquire self esteem, had experienced some progress in their socio-economic life and in the ability to better understand their ecological environment. Over 80% of the adult learners perceived that they had started to be more politically conscious as a result of the adult class they attended (Kolawole, 2007).

In a study on 'Rural Graduates' Perspectives of the Post Functional Literacy Curriculum in Tanzania' by Kinshaga (1985), most of the graduates said that what they learned was related to their environment and daily life. The learning of the 3Rs, modern agricultural methods, particularly the growing of the drought resistant millet in rows, health and political education were areas commonly cited by the graduates as being beneficial to them.

In a study on 'Perceptions of Literacy Programmes in Maputo and Nampula Provinces of Mozambique', Linden, Manhiga and Runo (2004) came up with four categories of reasons why literacy was important in the eyes of the participants. The reasons were family life, increasing family income, participation in society and family development. Family life was the first issue that appeared when talking about the importance of literacy, mainly in the answers of women, but also in those of men. The interviewees said that literacy had helped them to understand things of life and to solve problems of daily life such as children's home work, speaking with teachers and doctors, writing one's name and reading and writing letters.

Ishumi (1981) in a study of the 'Problems of Harnessing Community Education and Development Efforts Among Rural and Peri-urban Communities in Tanzania', found out that many elderly men and women in rural villages of Bagamoyo and Arusha held the view that reading and writing education were for children and for young men and women. They felt that their time was 'already gone' and it was 'too late to take anything'. The reviewed literature shows that adult learners' perception is important in determining participation in AFLC. The present study set out to establish the adult learners' perception of AFLC. These perceptions may explain why the rate of participation in AFLC is low.

With regard to reasons for adult learners' perception of AFLC, Brookfield (1986) argues that adults are autonomous and self-directed. Their teachers must therefore involve the participants entirely in the learning process as well as getting their perspectives about what topics to cover in projects of their interests.

Rogers (1992) argues that students come to education for many reasons, and not always the simple and obvious ones. There is no such thing as disreputable motive for joining class or a course. All reasons are acceptable because same motivation is better than none. The most common motivations are promotion, entry to new careers, more money and the need for change. These motivations are determined by the learners' background which includes gender, income levels and location. The present study sought to establish the reasons for adult learners' perceptions of AFLC.
Results from Senegalese and Egyptian studies on adult learners' perception of literacy by Scales and Burley (1992), show that adults in both countries wanted to read better, liked to read newspapers and retained what they read within a reasonable period of time.

Dolliso and Martin (1999) found out that farmers were motivated to learn by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. These factors included desire to increase profitability, desire to learn the latest technology, relevant materials and accessibility of the educational programmes. The farmers in this study perceived that motivation to learn was related to ambition to succeed, personal desire to learn, usefulness of the content materials, immediacy of the need and satisfaction from achievement.

In a study conducted to assess the needs of adult learners at Gateway Community Technical College (GCTC) in North Haven Connecticut, 52.3% of the respondents cited improving their income as a major reason for continuing their education while 54.4% reported that learning to solve personal and communication problems was not a reason. On personal and educational needs of adult learners, the study revealed the five most important issues were improving writing, test taking, study and mathematical skills and learning about job opportunities while the five least important issues were obtaining child care services, coping as single parents, navigating the campus, dealing with divorce and obtaining services for a physical disability (Luna, 2004).

In Namibia, a needs assessment study carried by Pendleton in 1997 (Bhola, 1999) found out that the respondents opted for knowledge and skills whose use is within more likely than others to get them access to material resources in their own immediate environment. They chose hand subjects that gave them learning skills in the following order; English 16%, mathematics 15% and science 13%. These were followed by primary health at 6%, general science at 4% and life science at 3%. Men wanted motor mechanics and women wanted needlework and bible study.

Kinshaga (1985) revealed that some graduates enrolled in the programme for the following reasons; some wanted to receive more knowledge or more education, others joined because they wanted to acquire literacy skills for their personal benefit, some wanted to learn about good agricultural methods and the importance of having balanced diets while others wanted to acquire literacy skills which could help them in performing their duties as cell leaders.

The reviewed literature shows that adult learners have varying perceptions and reasons for their perceptions of AFLC irrespective of their gender and location. No study has been carried out to establish whether there is a significant difference in perception across gender and location. It is therefore justifiable to carry out such a study as it may shed light on whether the learners have varying needs which ought to be addressed in the curriculum. This was the aim of the present study. Specific objectives of the study were to:

- establish adult learners’ perception of Adult Functional Literacy Curriculum (AFLC)
- assess influence of gender on adult learners’ perception of AFLC
- assess influence of location on adult learners’ perception of AFLC
- establish reasons for adult learners’ perception of AFLC

**Research Methodology**

**Research Design**

The study was based on the correlation design. This design helped in describing the relationship between learners' background and their perception of Adult Functional Literacy Curriculum (AFLC). A correlational study described the degree to which learners' background influenced their perception of AFLC. This is because a correlation study describes the degree to which two or more quantitative variables are related and it does so by the use of a correlation coefficient (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).

**Venue and Sample**

The study was carried out in Kisumu East District is in Kenya. The choice of Kisumu East District was influenced by the fact that there had been low participation in AFLP. In addition, no such study in the knowledge of the researcher had been carried out in this area. The study population consisted of 472 adult learners. Out of the 472 adult learners, 60 were male and 412 were female. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select male and female adult learners as well as urban and rural adult learners. This gave a total of 156 (33.3%) adult learners out of which 20 were male, 136 female, 74 urban and 82 rural.

**Instruments for Data Collection**

Data was collected using a questionnaire and an interview schedule.

**Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was administered personally by the researcher and her assistants. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended questions in two parts, A and B. Part A of the questionnaire comprised closed-ended questions regarding adult learners' background in terms of gender and location. Location was in two categories namely rural and urban. Part B of the questionnaire comprised closed-ended questions regarding adult learners' perception of AFLC. Learners'
perception towards AFLC was measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The weights represented whether the learners strongly agreed, agreed, remained undecided, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the current AFLC. The respondents were asked to use the criteria to give their feeling on the objectives, content, teaching methods and evaluation procedures of AFLC.

Interview Schedule

The interview schedule was in two parts, A and B. Part A comprised closed ended-questions regarding their backgrounds in terms of gender and location. Location was in two categories namely rural and urban. Part B comprised open-ended questions regarding their perception of AFLC and reasons for their perception of AFLC. Kinshaga (1985) observes that the interview enables the researcher to explore certain topics in depth and uncover the reasons and motivations which make the informants act in a certain way. It also provides the researcher with the opportunity to probe in-depth and make explicit areas which are ambiguous. The researcher and her assistants recorded the responses with permission from the respondents.

Validity of the Instruments

To ensure face validity, the instruments were given to three experts on the topic of study from Maseno University. Their suggestions were incorporated in the revised instruments which were used in the actual study.

Reliability of the Questionnaire

To ensure reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was carried out for the purpose of pre-testing it and to determine; if it would provide the data necessary for this study, if it would identify any problems respondents could encounter in completing the questionnaire and the clarity of the questionnaire to the respondents. The questionnaire was administered to 20 adult learners from the three centres and the split half procedure was employed. The reliability coefficient was calculated using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation. A coefficient of 0.75 was obtained and this was high enough to judge the instrument as reliable. The learners were selected randomly. Gall, Gall and Borg (2007), argue that for many qualitative and quantitative research studies two or three participants may be sufficient when conducting a pilot study. The results of the pilot study gave rise to suggestions which were included on the revised final questionnaire.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

In order to obtain official access to the study area to conduct research, a permit was obtained from the relevant authorities. Sampled centres were then visited in order to seek cooperation of the respondents as well as assuring them of confidentiality. To facilitate the study, the researcher recruited two research assistants and trained them for two days. This was to familiarize them with data collection instruments. Data was then collected from all sampled centres using the questionnaire and interview schedule which were administered directly to the sampled learners by the researcher and her assistants. Data was recorded by filling the questionnaires and making notes as the interviews progressed. The learners’ perceptions towards AFLC were coded using score values on a Likert scale ranging from 1-5 points. In scoring these items the following procedure was followed: For positively stated items, scores were distributed in this manner; strongly agreed - 5, agreed - 4, undecided - 3, disagreed - 2 and strongly disagreed - 1. For negatively stated items, the scoring procedure was reversed. The weighted responses were analyzed using means. The scores were interpreted as follows; mean scores > 1.0000 and ? 2.5000 implied negative perception, mean scores > 2.5000 and ? 3.5000 implied neutral perception and mean scores > 3.5000 and ? 5.0000 implied positive perception. A t-test was carried out to find out if there was a significant difference in the perception of AFLC across gender and location. Qualitative data gathered through interviews was transcribed and analyzed thematically.

Results and Discussion

Adult Learners’ Perception of AFLC

To establish the adult learners’ perception of the objectives, content, teaching methods and evaluation methods of AFLC, Learners responded to statements regarding the objectives, content, teaching methods and evaluation methods of AFLC. A Likert scale ranging from 1-5 points was used. The scores were interpreted as follows; mean scores > 1.0000 and ? 2.5000 implied negative perception, mean scores > 2.5000 and ? 3.5000 implied neutral perception and mean scores > 3.5000 and ? 5.0000 implied positive perception. The results are shown on table 1.

Table 1: Adult Learners’ Perception of AFLC  
(n = 156)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum Element</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
<th>Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>4.6980</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>4.5353</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Methods</td>
<td>4.0689</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Methods</td>
<td>4.3882</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Mean</td>
<td>4.4000</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 shows that adult learners had positive perception towards all the curriculum elements of AFLC. Learners registered mean scores within the range of scores > 3.5000 and < 5.0000 in the objectives, content, teaching methods, and evaluation methods of AFLC. The overall mean was 4.4000.

Influence of Gender on Adult Learners’ Perception of AFLC

To establish the influence of gender on adult learners’ perception of AFLC, learners were stratified into two groups; male and female. A Likert scale ranging from 1 - 5 was used. The weighted responses were analyzed using means. The scores were interpreted as follows; mean scores > 1.0000 and < 2.5000 implied negative perception, mean scores > 2.5000 and < 3.5000 implied neutral perception and mean scores > 3.5000 and < 5.0000 implied positive perception. A t-test was carried to find out if there was a significant difference in perception between the males and females. Table 2 shows that both male and female adult learners had a positive perception towards the objectives, content, teaching methods and evaluation methods of AFLC. The difference in perception towards the objectives, content and evaluation methods of AFLC between the males and females was however not statistically significant at the 0.05 significant level. However, there was a significant difference between the male and the female learners’ perception of the teaching methods of AFLC. These findings imply that facilitators should be careful while applying different teaching methods in AFLC as the male and female learners have different preferences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum Element</th>
<th>Male Mean Scores</th>
<th>Perception for Males</th>
<th>Female Mean Scores</th>
<th>Perception for Females</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>4.5667</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>4.7173</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>-1.587</td>
<td>.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>4.4650</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>4.5456</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>-0.714</td>
<td>.476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Methods</td>
<td>4.2450</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>3.9743</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>2.590</td>
<td>.011*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Methods</td>
<td>4.2222</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>4.4126</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>-1.680</td>
<td>.095</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at 0.05 level

Influence of Location on Adult Learners’ Perception of AFLC

To establish the influence of location on adult learners’ perception of AFLC, learners were stratified into two groups; rural and urban. A Likert scale ranging from 1 - 5 was used. The weighted responses were analyzed using means. The scores were interpreted as follows; mean scores > 1.0000 and < 2.5000 implied negative perception, mean scores > 2.5000 and < 3.5000 implied neutral perception and mean scores > 3.5000 and < 5.0000 implied positive perception. T-test was carried out to establish if there was a significant difference in perception between the rural and urban adult learners. Table 3 shows that both rural and urban adult learners had a positive perception towards all the curriculum elements of AFLC. There was no significant difference between the perception of rural and urban learners towards the objectives, content, teaching methods and evaluation methods of AFLC. These findings imply that AFLC has been tailored to meet the needs of the learners irrespective of their location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum Element</th>
<th>Rural Mean Scores</th>
<th>Perception for Rural Learners</th>
<th>Urban Mean Scores</th>
<th>Perception for Urban Learners</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>4.7303</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>4.6621</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>1.068</td>
<td>.287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>4.5293</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>4.5419</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>-.167</td>
<td>.868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Methods</td>
<td>3.9683</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>4.0541</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>-1.205</td>
<td>.230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Methods</td>
<td>4.4526</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>4.3168</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>1.791</td>
<td>.075</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reasons for Adult Learners’ Perception of AFLC

To establish reasons for learners' perception of AFLC, the respondents were required to identify the objectives, content, teaching methods and evaluation methods of AFLC which they liked best and least. They were also required to give reasons for their perceptions of AFLC. Findings indicated that adult learners had a positive perception of AFLC because it had enabled them to acquire knowledge and skills in reading and writing, performing arithmetic calculations, agriculture, and business management. Further, learners indicated that they liked AFLC because it had helped them to improve life in their families through the income they got from IGAs, health and environmental knowledge, as well getting employment. This is similar to findings by Nuwagaba (2006) where 92% of the respondents in Uganda said that nothing should be removed from AFLC because everything was useful. The use of teaching and evaluation methods that are appropriate for adult learners was hailed as another reason why adult learners liked AFLC. These findings are in agreement with observations by Bwatwa (1990) who argues that adults come to AFLPs with their experiences and expectations. They will thus appreciate teaching methods which allow them to express their expectations and experiences. The methods included demonstration, brainstorming, the use of questioning, evaluation through learner participation and the use of written tests. Lastly, the findings indicated that they disliked the individualized instruction and the lecture method because the two methods consumed a lot time, were ineffective with the few teachers which they had and that they involved sitting for long on furniture which was uncomfortable.

Conclusions and Implications

The study concludes that AFLC is meeting the needs of those participating contrary to the popularly held belief that it does not. This is because most of the adult learners involved in the study had positive perception towards most aspects of AFLC. Their major concern was with the use individualized instruction and the lecture method where they registered neutral and negative perceptions. There was no significant difference between the rural and urban adult learners' perception of AFLC as well as the male and female adult learners' perception of the objectives, content and evaluation methods of AFLC. However, there was a statistically significant difference between male and female adult learners' perception of the teaching methods of AFLC. The study thus concludes that gender influenced adult learners' perception of the teaching methods of AFLC. Lastly, the study concludes that adult learners who participated in the study had greatly benefited from AFLC and if poverty was addressed and the learning environment was improved more learners would enroll. Benefits accruing from AFLC were cited as reasons for positive perception while shortage of teachers was cited as reasons for the negative perception of the individualized instruction and the lecture method. It is advisable that facilitators consider the gender characteristics of their learners when selecting teaching methods as this was found to influence adult learners' perception of the teaching methods of AFLC. Further, there is need to address the teaching methods of AFLC so as to ensure that the lecture method is not over-utilized as this was found to have contributed to its being unpopular with the learners. Lastly there is need to address the problem of teacher shortage as this will ensure that the teachers use the appropriate teaching methods for adults. This will ensure that the lecture method is not over-utilized. It will also help to improve the effectiveness of the individualized instruction. This may eventually translate to improved participation in AFLC.

References


