Chapter 3
Challenges, Issues, and Trends in Adult Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how adults think, learn, and apply knowledge in their daily lives to effectively design a curriculum, create activities, and integrate valuable technology into the course design. The chapter summarizes adult learning theories, including self-directed, transformative, and experiential learning, as well as the concept of andragogy. Instructors are provided with practical tools and methodologies which will help them to produce effective adult learning experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Adult education maintains a diverse history in the United States. "Adult education is a practice in which adults engage in systematic and sustained self-educating activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values" (Merriam, 2007, p. 7). According to a recent National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) survey (2019), the number of hours adult students work in a week has increased from 20 hours to 34 hours per week since 1970 in the U.S. Moreover, in 1970 undergraduates spent 25 hours per week on their studies, but that number decreased to 15 hours per week by the year 2016 (NCES, 2019). Data from the NCES clearly indicates undergraduates spend more time working and less time studying.

More and more adults are returning to institutions of higher learning to advance their skills in search of better careers. It is, therefore, crucial that instructional designers at educational institutions reconsider what they deem to be appropriate strategies when designing and delivering instruction to fulfill the expectations of adults in the age of technology.

No single instructional design meets the needs of all students, and adult learners are no exception. In order to effectively deliver information to adults, one must understand how adults learn, the differences between adults and traditional students, and the issues adult learners face. While designing instruction

for non-traditional students, adults' current circumstances and values must be considered in order to fully meet their needs.

The objective of this chapter is to create an adult learning instructional model that takes the various adulthood perspectives into consideration as delineated below. The essence of the chapter critically reviews existing literature in adult education, addresses inconsistency in adult learning, and discusses variables that affect adult learning.

The author also analyzes various theories of adulthood, including biological, legal, psychological and sociological perspectives. The purpose is to examine how such theories influence adult learning and to develop an effective paradigm (model) for designing and integrating technological activities into adult education, keeping in mind the characteristics unique to adults during the instructional delivery.

In summary, this chapter uncovers a model that defines theories of adulthood and analyzes their implications for learning.

DEFINITION OF ADULTHOOD

Authors tend to define adulthood differently, with each perspective centering upon a different aspect. However, the most common theories agree upon the following definitions.

- **Biological Adulthood:** An adult is classified as a human or other organism that has reached sexual maturity. Cross-culturally, adulthood has been determined primarily by the start of puberty in both sexes.
- **Legal Adulthood:** The typical age of a legal adult is 18 in the United States. Legal rights vary among other countries and for those between the ages of 18 and 21.
- **Psychological State:** According to Erikson (1975), the stage in human development can be divided into three progressive eras: young adult (early 20s to 30s), middle adulthood (ages 40-64), and old age (65 years or older).
- **Social Adulthood:** Social adulthood deals with social roles. It refers to self-concept and the ability to responsibly and independently care for oneself. An adult can perform certain roles such as completing education, working, buying houses, living independently, marrying, and raising children, etc. (Hogan & Astone, 1986).

The definition of adulthood (or adult) varies from one culture to another. It includes biological, psychological, and social aspects. Regrettably, these concepts are not observed in mainstream education. Merriam and Brockett (1997) define an adult as a person who can intentionally perform a series of activities, abide by social norms, and demonstrate understanding of concepts to others. Possessing awareness or self-perception equally defines adulthood. It is important to note that neither physical maturity nor biological, psychological, or social standards are the sole criteria an adult must meet to achieve his or his goals. For adults to succeed, they must be prepared to learn and grow in knowledge and continue to strive for improvement as part of a lifelong learning activity.

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