

Chapter 77

Issues of Health– Related Physical Fitness of the Adult Learner

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discussed the importance of physical fitness concerning adult learners' readiness to participate meaningfully in academia. Despite the importance of health-related physical fitness, not many adults seem to have given the issue (physical fitness) the needed attention. The chapter focused on the issues associated with a reduced level of physical activity participation, and the changing modes of transportation, and how the issues could interfere with learning if not addressed — suggestions on how to improve physical fitness while learning constitutes parts of the discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Concerns of physical fitness are very critical in every sphere of life all over the world. This is because of the paramount importance of physical fitness of the individual. Mana Medical Associates (2019) identified improved health, staying active, improved quality of life reduced risk of injury and increase in life expectancy as some of the advantages of physical fitness. Excelling in any area of life requires optimum physical fitness. That is why fitness of the adult learner is crucial when it comes to adult learning. Being physically fit is associated with mental fitness because less uneasiness could help reduce stress (Check-rout, 2018). Mental fitness of the learner is a prerequisite for effective adult learning. Mental fitness helps one to be cognitively alert for serious academic activity which is demanded in higher education. The question is: What is physical fitness?

Physical fitness has been defined differently by various authors. According to Kent (2006), physical fitness is the ability to function efficiently and effectively, to enjoy leisure, to be healthy, to resist disease and to cope with emergency situations. Farnsword (2019) views physical fitness as being made up of cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility and body composition.

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Physical fitness has been defined also as the ability to carry out daily activities with vigor and alertness without undue fatigue and with ample energy to enjoy leisure pursuit and meet emergencies (Caspersen, Powell and Christenson, 1985). The authors categorized physical fitness into two- the health-related and skill related. The health-related such as cardiorespiratory endurance, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility and body composition are components of physical fitness important to public health as they concern every individual. Aniodo (2011) in his classification recognized heart rate and blood pressure as health-related fitness. The skill related physical fitness is made up of agility, balance, coordination, speed power and reaction time (Aniodo, 2011). This chapter however is concern with the health-related components which are of great importance to the adult learner.

The health-related components of the individual have a lot of issues surrounding them. One of the issues is the reduced level of physical activity participation. There are evidences to show that there is decline in level of physical activity participation in different parts of the world. According to Paudel, Owen, Owusu-Addo, and Smith (2018), the number of times people now involve themselves in physical activities has declined despite global evidences that it reduces the risk of having chronic diseases. This is consistent with the findings of Dai, Wang and Morrison, (2014) who found marriage, overweight, regular smoking and constant body pain as predictors of decline in physical activity participation among adult men and women. Another issue that is of concern in this chapter is the changing mode of transportation in the contemporary society. Mode of transport affects to a great extent the physical fitness of the individual. The assumption is that those who rely on automobile or other types of transportation without participation in any type of physical exercise may become be less fit than those who walk or use bicycle for mobility. Before now, people do a lot of journey using active transport modes when distances are within walkable range.

Many students who enroll in higher education in Africa are besieged with a lot of issues which affect health and fitness. However, unless attention is given to the health-related fitness of adult learners in higher education, achieving adult education objectives may be difficult. Therefore, the focus of this chapter is to address the issues that may impact the fitness of the adult learner. The general assumption is that students who are fit perform better in academics than the unfit students (California Dept. of Education, 2012).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter is anchored on adult learning theory of andragogy. The andragogy theory was popularized by Knowles (1980). The theory has five assumptions. It describes adult learner as having a self-concept. It points out that as a person matures in life, he or she ceases to depend on others but assumes the state of independence. This is relevant because the adult learner is expected to define his or her self-concept regarding physical activities and how to achieve physical fitness. The second assumption deals with experiences acquired over the years by the adult learner. This accumulated experience is relevant in dealing with the issues of health-related fitness. The third assumption points out that the adult learner acquires readiness to deal with the developmental task related to his or her social role. This assumption is about the readiness of the adult learner to deal with fitness issues related to his/her well-being. The 4th assumption focuses on the orientation to learning. It is concerned with the maturity of a person, i.e. the tendency to postpone action or to carry out action immediately. It deals with the issue of health-

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