

ANDRAGOGY VS. PEDAGOGY: ADULT LEARNERS' NOTIONS ON LEARNING EXPERIENCES AT TERTIARY LEVEL

NUR FAIRUZ WAHIDA IBRAHIM^{1*}, NORIZUL AZIDA DARUS² AND AMIZURA HANADI MOHD RADZI³

Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Perlis, Kampus Arau, 02600 Arau, Perlis, Malaysia.

*Corresponding author: fairuz427@uitm.edu.my

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Abstract: Adult learners are deemed to be unique and need to be taught differently. In contrast to children, adults are self-directed learners who prefer to learn in their own desired way. Thus, the andragogical approach can serve as one of the suitable methods for teaching them. However, implementing an andragogical approach at the tertiary level is challenging. Adult learners seem oblivious to the need for a change of approach. Furthermore, they appear to be overly comfortable in their traditional learning zone of pedagogical approach, where teachers/lecturers are the source of knowledge. Hence, this study, guided by Knowles' theory of andragogy, is a qualitative research investigating the issue of learning experiences via andragogical and/or pedagogical approaches of 15 adult learners of the Bachelor of Applied Linguistics at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam campus. The study also seeks to identify the approach preferred by them, as well as the techniques and support that lecturers need to practice in teaching adult learners. Overall, the findings of the study support the practice of both approaches in teaching adult learners efficiently at the tertiary level.

Keywords: Adult learner, andragogy, pedagogy, tertiary level.

Introduction

Andragogy, or andragogical, is not a novel approach within the education setting. Although people may not be aware that it is an andragogical approach, it has been widely used by individuals worldwide. Originally coined by Alexander Kapp in 1833, the approach was later developed by a few scholars (Fidishun, 2012). In 1967, Malcolm Knowles made use of the term andragogy to describe this approach (Knowles, 1980). At large, andragogy refers to the methods of teaching adults. The method or approach is rather significant as it is believed that adults are mature learners with distinct needs that must be fulfilled within the teaching and learning context, which differ from those of children.

However, implementing an andragogical approach at the tertiary level poses a significant challenge. Adult learners often exhibit a preference for a traditional, teacher-centred approach. Likewise, the scarcity of studies

examining the application of andragogy in learning the English language at a local level, particularly in Malaysia, underscores a critical gap in the existing literature. This lack of research limits our understanding of the effectiveness of andragogy in diverse linguistic and cultural settings. It also impedes the development of tailored pedagogical strategies that cater to the unique needs of adult learners in Malaysia.

Therefore, addressing these challenges and knowledge gaps is crucial for enhancing the quality of adult education and facilitating a more inclusive and engaging learning environment. Hence, this paper aims to investigate how adult learners perceive their learning experiences and whether a pedagogical and/or andragogical approach is preferred by them. This includes the techniques and support that lecturers or lecturers need to teach adult learners efficiently. The research questions for this paper are as follows:

1. How do adult learners perceive their learning experiences in learning the English language at the tertiary level, i.e., andragogy or pedagogy?
2. Which approach is preferred by the adult learners, andragogy or pedagogy?
3. What kind of instructional techniques and supports do lecturers need to efficiently practice in teaching adult learners at the tertiary level?

Literature Review

Overview of Andragogy

Andragogy, the art and science of teaching adults, was introduced by Knowles in 1970 as a response to the need for learning theories that are tailored specifically to adults (Knowles, 1980). Knowles developed his ideas on andragogy around six main assumptions that are distinctive from pedagogy, namely:

1. Learners' Need to Know

For adult learners to learn new things, it is significant for them to recognise the necessity of learning something. Only then can they obtain the supposed knowledge without any judgment.

2. Learners' Self-Concept

Adult learners are generally independent and tend to view themselves as capable of determining their own purpose in life. They are more responsible and prefer to have control over what, when, and how they learn.

3. Learners' Experience

Vast life experience makes adult learners unique. They use their past experiences and apply them in their learning journey.

4. Learners' Readiness to Learn

As adults grow, they tend to be extremely selective. Thus, in education, adult learners are generally interested in learning things that will have a positive impact on their personal, career, or social lives. In other words, they need to understand the reasons for learning before they are ready to absorb the knowledge being taught.

5. Learners' Orientation to Learning

Adult learners tend to approach learning through a task-centred or problem-centred orientation. They learn something with the intention of using the knowledge in the future.

6. Learners' Motivation to Learn

Adult learners are driven to motivate themselves to learn as they know that the knowledge is valuable to them in the long run. While children often motivate themselves through external sources, adult learners tend to motivate themselves through internal sources, such as improving their skills in relevant areas, enhancing their life, or seeking a raise or promotion. Accordingly, andragogy and pedagogy can be distinguished as follows in the table below.

Table 1: Disparities of andragogy and pedagogy

Andragogy Assumptions	Disparities	
	Andragogy	Pedagogy
Learners' Self-Concept	Learners depend on themselves to learn.	Learners depend on teachers to learn.
Learners' Experience	Learners use their experiences as a reference.	Learners have zero to little experience.
Learners' Readiness to Learn	Learners learn something when they recognise the value of learning it.	Learners let teachers decide what they learn.

Learners' Orientation to Learning	Learners learn knowledge that could be applied immediately in their personal or professional lives.	Learners learn knowledge for the sake of knowing about the subject and not to apply it.
Learners' Motivation to Learn	Learners are motivated by internal factors, i.e., self-improvement, recognition, etc.	Learners are motivated by external factors, i.e., parents or teachers.
Learners' Need to Know	Learners need to know 'why' they need to learn something.	Learners do not need to know 'why' they need to learn something.

Source: Knowles, Elwood and Richard (1998)

Overall, Knowles (1968, as cited by Merriam, 2001) considered adult learners to be "self-directed and autonomous" in their own learning and that the role of lecturers is to facilitate the acquisition and construction of knowledge.

Previous Studies on Andragogy/Andragogical Approach

Among the studies on andragogy or the andragogical approach was one conducted by Choudhury (2023), which involved six students from the Department of English at a private university in Dhaka. From the analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted with the students, it was revealed that there was a need for a change in approach from the wholly pedagogical approach that has been the usual practice. The findings suggested that a blending of pedagogical and andragogical principles in teaching could bring optimum learning where all the needs of the learners were addressed.

A study conducted by Tezcan (2022) explored the effectiveness of a teacher training practice in Turkey that has been implementing pedagogical principles since its introduction in the 2000s. It was reported that, based on the 69 adult learners who participated in the study, it was significant for the teacher training practice to apply andragogical principles. Notably, the application of the andragogical approach at the early stage of adulthood can increase participation and interest and positively affect learning (Tezcan, 2022).

Manangsa, Gusmuliana, and Apriani (2020) conducted a study to determine the implementation of andragogy used by English lecturers at IAIN Curup in learning. Their findings indicated that the andragogical approach has not yet been fully applied by the lecturers in the institution. Based on Knowles' theory, some assumptions or principles lecturers have practiced in their teachings include Learners' Experience and Learners' Motivation to Learn.

In a study examining the andragogical approach in the learning process at the institute, Kurniati *et al.* (2022) noted that andragogical principles support adults' psychological needs. As adults mature, they develop into individuals who are able to direct themselves, prompting the emergence of a profound psychological need. In essence, the psychological need refers to the desire to be acknowledged and treated by others as a person who directs himself, rather than being directed, forced, and manipulated by others (Kurniati *et al.*, 2022). Nonetheless, some limitations of implementing such an approach include the lack of resources, time, opportunities, as well as the absence of psychological or mental preparation among adult learners.

Methods

For this study, 15 adult learners were involved. All of them were full-time learners in the fifth semester of the Bachelor of Applied Linguistics programme at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam, Selangor. They were all Bumiputera learners with an age range from 21 to

25 years. The respondents were selected using a snowball sampling technique.

As this study is qualitative, one of the data collection techniques used to gather information was virtual semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were selected as they could lead this study in learning how people construct their realities, i.e., how they view, define, and experience the world (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016). The interview sessions were conducted virtually to minimise the inconvenience for the students who were juggling classes and participating in this study. Note that each interview session lasted about an hour and was recorded using Google Meet. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim using Atlas.TI software. Accordingly, the respondents' responses were analysed for recurring patterns, and the themes were identified and presented in detail to validate the findings.

Moreover, to complement and triangulate the data, diary keeping written by the respondents was also used in this study. Diary keeping was employed to generate in-depth and rich insights, which were recorded promptly, hindering the potential for reminiscing about memories that are often reported in traditional methods, such as interviews (Unterhitzenberger & Lawrence, 2022). As such, respondents were requested to write an entry per week for seven consecutive weeks in Penzu, one of the free online diary platforms. Penzu was selected as the medium since the respondents demonstrated a strong familiarity with using it, indicating their previous experience and engagement with the platform

prior to this study. The use of an online diary also enabled respondents to reflect on their daily experiences, thoughts, and emotions related to the application of andragogy principles in their learning and teaching processes. Moreover, a list of items was provided to the respondents as guidance for writing their entries prior to the entry submission. They were required to submit their entries through the online platform on a weekly basis. Following this, all entries were successfully received from all the respondents at the end of the seventh week. The entries were then compiled and transcribed verbatim.

Results and Discussion

Fifteen respondents reviewed in this qualitative study presented distinctive characteristics as well as varied perceptions towards andragogy and pedagogy. However, only two respondents' responses are included in this study. The focus is given more to the content of the responses rather than on the grammatical aspects. The explanations are categorised into data collection techniques to address the research questions. Since the study is still ongoing, only some parts of the data are revealed in this paper.

Analysis of the Semi-structured Interviews

The findings are discussed based on the semi-structured interview questions. Three main themes that emerged include: (1) Understanding Andragogy and Pedagogy, (2) Andragogy in the Classroom, and (3) Disparity of Andragogy and Pedagogy.

Table 2: Main themes and sub-themes of the semi-structured interviews

Themes	Sub-themes
Understanding Andragogy and Pedagogy	Definitions Concepts
Andragogy in the Classroom	Learners' In-class Activity Learners' Experience in Tertiary Learners' Beliefs as an Effective Approach Learners' Satisfaction
Disparity of Andragogy and Pedagogy	Engagement Motivation Effective Materials Guidance

(1) *Understanding Andragogy and Pedagogy*

The first main theme was derived from the respondents' responses to interview questions, which are based on Research Question 1: How do adult learners perceive their learning experiences in learning the English language at the tertiary level, i.e., andragogy or pedagogy? From the thematic analysis, this theme can be separated into two sub-themes: Definitions and concepts. The sub-themes are justified in the sample quote

"Emmm, no, I've never heard of that actually. I don't think I've ever heard of it." (RJ)

"Never heard of andragogy and pedagogy." (RL)

(2) *Andragogy in the Classroom*

The second main theme was derived from the respondents' responses to interview questions, which is based on Research Question 2: Which approach is preferred by the adult learners, andragogy or pedagogy? Under this thematic analysis, four sub-themes emerged: Learners' in-class activity, learners' experience in tertiary, learners' beliefs as an effective approach, and learners' satisfaction. The sub-themes are clarified in the sample quote below. A sample transcription from two respondents, RJ and RL, is included in this paper.

"I think my lecturer is teaching the andragogy because he gives us like test or a task, but he wants us to do it ourselves. When it's all done, he will check and if it's not okay, he will tell us what is right and what is wrong. So yeah, I am confident that he is teaching us andragogy." (RJ)

On the other hand, while respondent RL believed that her lecturer was practicing andragogy, she undoubtedly felt bored with the approach. Despite

"My lecturer is applying andragogy, I think. She let us do task on our own first. But I think that letting us do task on our own is boring. I need the lecturer to be provide more knowledge." (RL)

Thus, recognising the diverse personalities, preferences, and needs of adult learners is essential for lecturers, as this understanding helps in developing effective instructional strategies and fostering a successful learning experience.

below. A sample transcription from two respondents, RJ and RL, is included in this paper.

Sub-theme: Concepts

This sub-theme is derived from the respondents' responses to interview questions. The respondents, RJ and RL, stated that they were unfamiliar with the terms andragogy and pedagogy and that they had no knowledge of either approach.

Sub-theme: Learners' Experience in Tertiary

The respondent, RJ, claimed that her lecturer was teaching them using an andragogical approach. Instead of providing them with the knowledge or the answer to the task, he asked them to seek the knowledge or find the answer themselves. This demonstrated one of Knowles' assumptions, i.e., Learners' Self-Concept, where learners are responsible for their own learning. Contrary to the traditional approach, pedagogy is one in which the teacher becomes the sole source of knowledge. Following this, discussions were held, and feedback was provided by the lecturer

being responsible for her own learning, she preferred to have the lecturer as the source of knowledge.

(3) *Disparity of Andragogy and Pedagogy*

The third main theme was derived from the respondents' responses to interview questions, which is based on Research Question 3: What kind of instructional techniques and support do

lecturers need to efficiently practice in teaching adult learners at the tertiary level? For this thematic analysis, four sub-themes emerged: Engagement, motivation, effective materials, and guidance. The sub-themes are clarified in the sample quote below. Sample transcription from one respondent, RJ, is included in this paper.

Sub-theme: Guidance

The respondent, RJ, explained that she believed adults are different from children. Thus, the

learning approach would be distinct. For RJ, adults could easily be asked for opinions based on the materials being discussed in class. This is in contrast to children, who might struggle when asked for their opinions on issues. Note that child learners need to be guided more by their teachers rather than adult learners, who are more independent and experienced in their learning. This established Knowles' assumptions, i.e., Learners' Experience, where learners use their experiences as guidance in their learning process.

"I don't think adults and children should be treated equally because the psychological brain of both adults and children are completely different, and also sometimes children will understand like... for example, on Advance Reading, they might not understand on the issues that are happening right now. We know as adults, we do understand, so we can give our take, and if the children are supposed to give the take on an issue, they might give on the surface only like not in depth of the issue." (RJ)

Conversely, respondent RL described that teaching children and adults was similar. RL emphasised that it was not about the approach (andragogy or pedagogy) or merely lecturers'

guidance, but rather the learners themselves who have eventually grown into responsible people and become independent with their own learning.

"There are no disparities between teaching children and adults. I feel like as I move through from primary to tertiary, the learning is the same. It just students have to take own initiative to include creativity like note making, watching extra video, etc." (RL)

Therefore, the varying perspectives provided by both adult learners above could spark creative transformations. This is necessary for respected lecturers to embrace the challenge and explore unconventional methods.

to share their thoughts and experiences for seven consecutive weeks based on the suggested questions, which served as guidance in writing the entries. Three main themes that emerged are: (1) About the Course, (2) In the Classroom, and (3) Learners' Attitude.

Analysis of the Diary Keepings

The findings are discussed from the diary keepings/entries. The respondents were requested

Table 3: Main themes and sub-themes of the Diary Keepings

Themes	Sub-themes
About the course	Learners' Perceptions
	Learners' Hopes
	Learners' Past Experiences
In the classroom	Learners' In-class Activity
	Learners' Positive Views on Activity
	Learners' Satisfactions

Learners' attitude	Peer Assistance/Working Together
	Staying Motivated
	Satisfaction with Teaching
	Methods/Lecturers

(1) *About the Course*

The first main theme was derived from the respondents' responses in diary keeping, which are based on Research Question 1: How do adult learners perceive their learning experiences in learning English Language at the tertiary level, i.e., andragogy or pedagogy? From thematic analysis, this theme can be separated into three sub-themes: learners' perceptions, hopes, and past experiences. The sub-themes are justified in

the sample quote below. Sample transcription from one respondent, RJ, is included in this paper.

Sub-theme: Learners' Perceptions

The respondent, RJ, stated that she found the course interesting and worth learning, as it helped her understand articles by reading and thinking critically. In fact, the task/project (in this case, the exhibition) that was required for them to fulfil also benefits them in the long run.

"I actually find it interesting and worth to learn because it helps us to have a better understanding of how to read articles & even do the exhibition for people to see and evaluate before the end of the semester. So, I find it interesting because I am a social butterfly, so it's something I like to do."

(RJ)

Respondent RL, however, claimed that she could not find interest and relevance in the material that her lecturer provided and discussed

in class. The frustration somehow led her to question the value of the subject she was learning.

"Like this week, we were given an article about how The Beatles help the scientific research, and it is interesting, but it doesn't interest me, and I personally don't care. Courses like this make me wonder what exactly career route I should take after completing my degree, and it frustrates me to no end."

(RL)

This confirmed Knowles' assumptions, i.e., Learners' Readiness to Learn, in which learners would only learn when they eventually recognise the value of the subject that they are learning. Another assumption that reflects Knowles is the Learners' Need to Know, the need for them to be learning such matters, and the benefits it could bring to their lives.

thematic analysis, three sub-themes were identified: learners' in-class activity, positive views on the activity, and satisfaction.

Sub-theme: Learners' Positive Views on Activities

The respondent, RJ, admitted to enjoying the activities conducted by the lecturer in class. Not only did they have written exercises, but also a discussion on an issue. The lecturer seemed to have all learners actively involved in the discussion. Towards the end of the discussion, questions were posed, and selected learners were identified to share their answers with the class. Consequently, feedback was shared by the lecturer with the learners. Both discussion and feedback are examples of instructional techniques

(2) *In the Classroom*

The second main theme was derived from the respondents' responses in diary keeping, which is based on Research Question 2: Which approach is preferred by the adult learners, andragogy or pedagogy? and Research Question 3: What kind of instructional techniques and supports do lecturers need to efficiently practice in teaching adult learners at the tertiary level? Under this

and supports that are essential for adult learners, particularly in a tertiary institution.

“This week was fun! We did some exercises during class, and all of us did it together. We even did the question of death, where my lecturer chose two people to answer on behalf of the whole class. It was fun because everyone was excited and nervous! Hehe. Thank God, they answered it right.”
(RJ)

Meanwhile, respondent RL explained that she had low self-esteem, which hindered her from voicing her opinion and discussing it publicly

among her classmates. Although she had no problems working in small groups, she struggled to work in a large crowd.

“I did fine when discussing among my group, but when it comes to presenting my opinion to the class or class-wide discussion, I was not confident to join in the discussion. Some of my classmates are really confident in expressing their thoughts to the point of being rude.”
(RL)

The above describes some obstacles that adult learners face. It ranges from regular internal factors, such as personality weaknesses or poor time management, to more complex external factors, including family and work obligations and limited financial resources. This is where lecturers play a vital role in guiding the learners' paths of lifelong learning and personal development.

(3) *Learners' Attitude*

The third main theme was derived from the respondents' responses in diary keeping, which is based on Research Question 3: What kind of instructional techniques and supports do lecturers

need to efficiently practice in teaching adult learners at the tertiary level? Under this thematic analysis, three sub-themes were discovered, including peers' assistance, staying motivated, and satisfaction with teaching methods/lecturers.

Sub-theme: Peers' Assistance/Working Together
The respondent, RJ, stated that she enjoyed working with her peers as it helped her in developing her ideas. Additionally, her extroverted personality also enabled her to easily connect and collaborate with her peers. This would be another technique that lecturers should consider when teaching adult learners.

“I'm an extrovert, so I prefer working in groups because I'm a social butterfly, so obviously I would prefer being in groups, as it does help me to expand my ideas. Hehe.”
(RJ)

Conversely, respondent RL clarified that, despite preferring to work in groups, she preferred to work individually, depending on the

task given. She felt certain about the quality of her own work, rather than that of others.

“Although I like group work, I prefer individual work better, but it depends on the assignment. With individual assignments, I am free to work on my time and never have to worry about the quality of others' work.”
(RL)

This again indicated the adult learners' preferences for their learning process. Various teaching approaches and types of assessments

should be tailored to suit the educational needs of individuals. It can be summarised that the respondents perceived their learning experiences

in the English language at the tertiary level as distinctive compared to their school years. They felt that they needed to take more control over their learning and that their achievements were a direct result of their effort. Moreover, activities in the classroom were more hands-on. There were lots of discussion sessions, writing activities, and games, among others. This brought an advantage to the adult learners, as they could share their rich experiences during the activities and, at the same time, engage with peers and learn from one another.

Furthermore, the activities conducted by the lecturers in the classroom had encouraged the learners to become self-directed. It has been proven that lecturers stimulate learners to search for tasks themselves (via the Internet, library), as opposed to school years, where teachers would guide and inform them on everything they should do. This had given the adult learners the feeling of being responsible for their own learning.

Additionally, it was observed that andragogy has enabled learners to become independent and has prompted the lecturer to act as a facilitator. Lecturers were believed to encourage their learners to work independently. They would then later facilitate the learners and provide ample feedback to them learners. Finally, the learners would eventually discuss the subject thoroughly with their lecturer.

In essence, incorporating a pedagogical approach to adult learners can be highly relevant and beneficial. Such a method might be well-suited to address the diverse needs and preferences of adult learners from varied backgrounds.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the perceptions of adult learners regarding their experiences in learning the English language at the tertiary level. The findings indicate that adult learners value a learning environment that is

engaging, relevant, and supportive of their unique needs and preferences. While some adult learners may lean towards the self-directed nature of andragogy, others may find value in the more traditional pedagogy. In addition, the study suggests that a combination of both approaches and a personalised approach tailored to individual learner needs may be most effective.

Overall, this study emphasises the significance of understanding adult learners' perspectives, preferences, and needs in learning the English language at the tertiary level. Since they come from different backgrounds, experiences, and have different motivations, lecturers need to consider all these factors before creating lesson plans. Consequently, by considering the previously mentioned factors and adapting instructional practices accordingly, lecturers can enrich the learning experiences and outcomes of adult learners in higher education settings.

In line with this, future researchers should consider including adult learners from various tertiary-level institutions across different cultural and geographical contexts. This may reveal how cultural factors influence the needs, preferences, and ultimately the outcomes of adult learners, offering a broader perspective on this matter.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts, and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

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