

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Profiling and need assessment of third year bachelor of nursing sciences adult learners at the University of Namibia, Main Campus

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ABSTRACT

There is an increase of adult learners in higher education which can be challenging during their study period as they have to balance their social responsibilities with academic activities. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the profile and need assessment of third year Bachelor of nursing sciences adult learners at the University of Namibia, main campus. A quantitative, descriptive cross sectional study design was utilized during this study. Data was collected through self-administered online questionnaire among 29 participants. The study found that most participants are aged 21 years, single with no children. Furthermore, most participants reside in the informal settlement with nonconductive learning environment due to noise and are using public transport to reach the campus. Most participants indicated that they are receiving study loan from the Namibia Financial Assistance Fund while few got financial assistance from the family members. Some students indicated having disabilities and most students indicated that they have used online teaching and learning before the outbreak of COVID 19 in March 2020 that cause shift in education. The study serves as the baseline information on student profiling and serve as a basis for further strategies to address the situation or for further research.

Key Words: Profiling, Student nurses, Adult learners

1. INTRODUCTION

There is an increase of adult learners entering higher education. In order for the educators to know and understand their students better so that they can easily address their needs and challenges faced, learners profiling is needed. A student's learning profile is the complete information obtained from the learners that helps educators learn more about their students.^[1] Learner profiles may include information such as: sociodemographic, skills, strengths, and interests, potential barriers to learning and anything else the student or the educator deems important.^[2]

Furthermore, learner profiles can help higher education educators to build relationships with the students and understand them from their perspective. Therefore, identification of student needs and crafting learning experiences based on student profiling is imperative.^[3] Several authors defined adult learner differently. Non-traditional adult learners are customarily defined as individuals over the age of 20 entering higher educational institutions for the first time. However, some higher educational institutions consider 25 years and older as non-traditional adult learners.^[4,5] Adult learners can also be defined as autonomous and self-directing.^[6] Some adult learners join higher education with working experience

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aiming at furthering their studies to increase their financial income.^[7] They manage a variety of social roles while pursuing higher education such as being a worker, spouse, or partner, parent and actively involved in community activities are a few examples. However, these many roles pose challenges for adult students to contribute time for academic study/work and involvement in college life.^[5] Therefore adult learners might need extra support for their academic success.

Moreover, adult learners can be challenged during their study period as they have to balance their social responsibilities with academic activities. Some of these barriers include lack of time, financial challenge, lack of confidence, lack of study interest, lack of information about opportunities to learn, child care problems and transport challenges.^[8] Several authors indicated challenges and barriers faced by adult learners in higher education such as De Vito,^[9] Morris et al.^[10] and Muilenburg & Berge.^[11] Those barriers can negatively affect adult education especially in completing higher education. Furthermore, due to an increase of online learning and teaching in higher education, adult learners may also be challenged by inability to attend online classes due to the lack of internet usage skill. Nevertheless, some researchers have indicated the lack of significant differences in students' performances among online learning and face-to-face learning.^[12-14] Therefore, student profiling and need assessment improve academic success and perseverance as the educator would know students better and would assist in addressing their needs. However, the researcher could not retrieve study that investigates challenges faced by adult learners in Namibia.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the study is to identify barriers that could contribute to challenges faced by adult learners during the study in higher education.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- Identify the Sociodemographic characteristics of adult learners;
- Determine the provision of financial and basic need facilities for adult learners;
- Determine the health status of adult learners;
- Determine the learning preferences and online learning skills among adult learners.

2. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative, descriptive cross-sectional study design was utilized during this study. The researcher employed a sin-

gle cross-sectional design as the study was conducted in the present time in a single round of data collection.^[14] The setting of the study was University of Namibia, School of Nursing, main campus. The study population was all third-year nursing students registered for the third year of study in Bachelor of Nursing Science (Honors). There were 105 students in the third year of bachelor's degree. However, only 33 students agreed to participate in the study. Inclusion criteria for this study required the student nurse to be in a third year of bachelor's degree study at the main campus and willing to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria include student nurses who are not on third year of study and third year students in other campuses. The researcher used the student register to get the name of third year student nurses. Due to the limited number of the students who indicated their willingness to participate no sampling was carried out. Four, students participated in piloting and they were excluded from the main study. The questionnaire was adjusted after the pilot test. Therefore, only 29 students participated in the main study. Data were collected with the questionnaires developed by the researchers. After agreeing to participate in the study, the researchers send out the questionnaires to participants via emails and they were given a period of two weeks to respond and return the questionnaires via email. This was done as there was a restriction of gathering, due to the COVID-19 regulations which also prohibit face to face classes during the data collection time. The questionnaire was accompanied by the information regarding the study, the aims and objectives as well as the consent form to be signed by the participants. All 29 questionnaires were returned, giving a 100% response rate. Data were coded and analyzed by SPSS Version 26. Individual questionnaire were coded to avoid wrong entry and computed correctly. Since the research was for study purposes for the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education at the University of Namibia, no ethical clearance from UNAM ethical clearance committee was necessary. However, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and written consent was obtained prior to participation in the study to ensure that local ethical requirement has been met. Participants were assured that their participation was voluntary and their personal details could not be shared with anyone. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and their withdrawal could not lead to any punishment.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Sociodemographic characteristics

Data was obtained from 29 participants with the age range of 21 to 46 years old. Most of the participants 14 (48.3%) were aged 21 years, followed by participants aged 22 years

old who represents 8 (27.6%). Two (6.9%) participants were aged 23 years, while age 24, 25, 29 and 46 were represented by one (3.4%) respectively. Majority of the participants 28 (96.6%) were female and 1 (3.4%) were male. Regarding the marital status, majority of the participants 28 (96.6%) were single, and one (3.4%) participant was married. All participants are Namibian citizens. On the ethnicity background, majority of the participants 27 (93.2%) are Wambos, one (3.4%) represents Damara>Nama and Caprivian respectively. Among participants, 27 (93.2%) speaks Oshiwambo, 1 (3.4%) speaks Afrikaans and Khoekhoegab respectively. Majority 26 (89.7%) had no children, 2 (6.9%) has 3 children, while 1 (3.4%) participant has one child. All 29 (100%) participants passed grade 12 before they come for tertiary education.

Regarding the number of years passed before participants started higher education, the majority 11 (37.9%) joined tertiary education the year after they completed secondary education. Seven participants (24.1%) joined, one year after completed secondary education, four (13.8%) after two years after completed secondary education, 3 (10.3%) joined, two (5.9%) after 10 years and one (3.4%) after 14 years respectively.

3.2 Financial and basic needs of adult learners

Majority (21, 72.4%) of the participants stay in Katutura, four (13.8%) lives in UNAM hostel, three (10.4%) in Khomasdal, and one (3.4%) participants lives in, Rehoboth which is 93 kilometers to Windhoek. Regarding accommodation 12 (41.3%) lives with guardians or relatives, six (21%) lives with parents, five (17%) lives in the hostel, four (13.8%) are renting alone, while two (6.9%) are renting with siblings. Majority (27, 93%) indicated that they have access to portable water, opposing two (7%) with no access to portable water. Similarly, 27 (93%) have access to electricity, while two (7%) participants had no access to electricity. Furthermore, 17 (58.6%) have access to internet while 12 (41.4%) have no access to the internet. Majority (23, 79%) of the participants indicated that their accommodation are in the conducive environment, against six (21%) resided in the unconducive environment. Among those participants in unconducive environment for study, one (17%) indicated that she is using a phone or candle for light, two (33%) stated that the environment are noisy while three (50%) indicated that their accommodation are surrounded by too many sebeens that contribute to too noisy and unsafe environment. Regarding the mode of transport to school, majority (18, 62%) are using taxi, six (21%) are walking from the hostel, four (13.8%) are using the bus and one participant (3.2%) drive to school. The distribution of the time spend in travelling

is as follow. Majority of the participants 21 (72.4%) spend 21 to 40 minutes, four (13.8%) spend 41 to 80 minutes and less than 20 minutes respectively. On financial status, majority 22 (76%) got loan for study from Namibia Financial Assistance Fund while seven (24%) participants are funded by their families.

3.3 Health status of adult learners

The researcher also enquired if participants has physical disability. Majority (28, 96.6%) disagree, opposing one (3.4%) participants who indicated that she is physically disabled. Majority (23, 79.3%) stated that they do not have vision challenge, not concurring with six (20.7%) indicated the presence of vision challenge. Hearing challenge was confirmed by one (3.4%) participant, opposing 28 (96.6%) participants who stated that they do not suffer from hearing challenges. All participants 29 (100%) indicated that they do not suffer from long term health problems.

3.4 Learning preferences

Participants were asked to indicate how best they can learn, whereby majority (20, 69%) indicated to be visual learners who use visualization to see pictures in their minds, 4 (14%) are auditory learners who like to hear directions aloud while 5 (17%) are kinesthetic learners who write or draw while listening as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Learning preferences of participants

Learning Preference	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Visual learner	20	69
Auditory learner	4	14
Kinesthetic learner	5	17

On the question whether participants had used online learning before March 2020 when the state of emergency was declared due to COVID-19 pandemic, 25 (86.2%) agreed, while 4 (13.8%) participants disagreed that they had never used online learning before. All participants agreed that, they know how to use the internet. On the question whether participants like online teaching and learning, majority 24 (82.8%) agreed while five (17.2%) participants indicated that they do not like online teaching and learning.

4. DISCUSSION

The information regarding sociodemographic in student profiling is important a valuable tool for the development of strategies that contemplate their demands, and also improve the quality of the teaching and learning process and reduce dropout rates.^[15] The current study was represented by most participants aged 21 years old, and one participant was 46 years old. The age range of 21 to 29 shows that although

most students are adult learners, most people consider studying during those ages. The maximum age category 46 shows that people can go back to higher education late in life with different reasons such as career change. These adult learners need support as they might be having other responsibilities such as family, child care or part time job that may hinder their success or complete learning. Majority 96.6% of participants in this study are female. As participants are studying towards nursing qualification, it has been considered in the society that nursing is a female profession.^[16] This is evidenced by low number of male students studying nursing. The study shared the same sentiment with other studies in which the percentage of female were higher among nursing students.^[1,17] However, in this world of equality and equity, men are currently seemingly increasing in the nursing profession compared to previous years.

The current study finding indicated that most ethnicity in Namibia were represented which shows that the University of Namibia is implementing inclusivity and diversity during student admission. According to Wrighton^[18] students with different ethnic groups tend to operate smoothly and often exhibit increased confidence about both performance and intra-group dynamics. In contrast, heterogeneous groups are known to exhibit fragmentation, disagreement, and interpersonal conflict. Most of the participants 96.6% were single and 89.7% have no children which are consistent with other studies.^[1,17] Child care responsibility is one of the factors that may hinder adult learner's progress. Some adult learners can be affected by arranging for child care when they are attending classes. This will also need family or friend support in terms of social support and financial support. Hunter-Johnson & Smith^[19] conducted the study among adult learners in the Caribbean that reveals that family commitment, childcare and responsibilities, lack of family support was reported among challenges faced by adult learners with children.

The current study reveals that most of the participants joined higher education more than a year after they completed secondary education. This could be caused by lack of further study opportunities in the country. There are only three institutions of higher education that train nurses in the country that may contribute to people not admitted sooner after completed secondary education. Regarding accommodation, majority of the participants lived with their parents or guardians. This indicates the good relationship in families which can make it easier to adapt to the changes that occur when they go to universities.^[1] Moreover, the families provide social support and help the students in their decision making. The study also found that most of the participants have access to electricity and water. Moreover, the current study also

reveals that most of the participants live the unconducive environment that are noisy and surrounded by shebeens. This can contribute to disturbance during the study and contribute to student failure. Conducive learning environments contribute to the development of self-motivation and skills^[20] that might influence student success. A learning environment is defined as all of the physical surroundings, psychological or emotional conditions, and social or cultural influences affecting the growth and development of an adult engaged in an educational enterprise.^[21] Majority of the participants are using taxi as a mode of transport to the campus that might cause delay in reaching the campus on time. These findings concur with Kwembeya & Mbukusa's^[3] study on profiling biology students at the University of Namibia.

It was found that 76% of the participants received financial aid in the form of a loan by the Namibia Financial Assistance Fund followed by those whose studies are funded by their families. Financial challenges could negatively affect performance and could also lead to drop out. Regarding disability, few participants indicated the presence of physical disability and vision challenges. Expectations of higher enrolment of students with disabilities have prompted academic institutions to introduce innovative programs to meet these students' needs. The University of Namibia has a disability unit that supports students with disabilities. Furthermore, the UNAM Teaching and Learning policy strives to support students learning and teaching based on their individual need.^[22] The importance of the institution's attitudes toward students with disabilities, their awareness of these students' needs, and their knowledge of the reasonable accommodations available can assist students with disability to cope. These attitudes influence success or failure of students with disabilities and affect inclusion in higher education. Therefore, in this context for student with visual disability, lecturers should ensure that the needs of this student are catered for, especially on providing reading materials with a bigger font that the student is able to read. Furthermore, there is a need to assess the physical disability of the student for adequate support. Vickerman and Blundell^[23] stress those institutions of higher education need to show to potential students that impairments will not affect their opportunities and that they will receive support and understanding.

Majority (69%) of the participants indicated to be visual learners. According to Fleming,^[24] visual individuals prefer to learn information presented in charts, graphs, and other symbolic devices instead of words; those with an auditory or Aural preference learn from spoken lessons and talking (information that is "heard or spoken"), such as lectures, group discussion, radio, email, using mobile phones, speaking, web-chat and talking things through. Students with a

read and write preference need the educator to emphasize based (the printed text) input and output reading and writing in all its forms but especially manuals, reports, essays and assignments. Contrary kinesthetic perceptual preference is related to the use of experience and practice and individual with this dominant mode prefer to learn through direct practice, for example, demonstrations, simulations, videos and movies of “real” things, as well as case studies, practice and application.^[3] Therefore, higher education educators should consider their students with different learning preferences and should be flexible to accommodate each learner in teaching practices.

5. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted among most middle aged, single, female adult learners from diverse ethnic groups in Namibia. Most of participants leaves with family members and are using taxi as a mode of transport to the campus. Participant’s accommodations are in unconducive noisy environment although they have access to portable water and electricity. Most of participants are visionary learners and few partici-

pants indicated that they have physical and vision disability. Majority have used online learning before and they are comfortable with online learning.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the study conclusion:

- Increase intake of all ethnic group and male students in the nursing program;
- Accommodate international adult students in the nursing program;
- Provide students with accommodation in the UNAM hostel especially those leave in noisy areas;
- Strengthen the assistance and support of student with disabilities;
- Conduct personal development workshops on educators to be able to recognize and accommodate students with different learning preferences.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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