

# ADULTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## 1.0 Who are they?

Adult can be defined as a person who has grown to full size and strength and intellectually and emotionally mature<sup>1</sup>. From this definition we may understand that an adult has two main features namely physically strength and intellectually mature and an adult learner therefore refers to those who have all these features and studying at tertiary level. Adult learner in higher education can be categorized into undergraduate students and postgraduate students whereby the former refers to diploma and first degree and the latter post graduate diploma, master and PHD programmes.

As an adult learner either in public or private higher education, they are different with students in the primary or secondary school. They tend to be more self-directed, have a rich reservoir of experience that can serve as a resource for learning, frequently affected by your need to know or do something, tend to have a life-task or problem-centered orientation to learning as opposed to a subject-matter orientation and generally motivated to learn as opposed to being obligated<sup>2</sup>. These tendencies make them more pro-active, independent and self directed to gain knowledge from educators.

## 2.0 Why are they continuing to study?

Every adult learner has its own purpose and reason to continue study at undergraduate or post graduate level. Generally, the purpose of continuing study in higher education is to enhance the chances of employability, future career and to seek further knowledge of any area of interest. Studying at university enable them to study things that they could not at school, whereby they can focus in on the specific subject areas that find most interesting and will lead on to a whole host of careers such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, academicians, accountants and so on and so forth. In other words, in the context of modern time, learning in higher education provides an opportunity to any individual to develop and improve skills in their area of interest through knowledge and training that they gained in the university.

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<sup>1</sup> AS Hornby. (1994. Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. London: Oxford University Press. p 17.

<sup>2</sup> Atherton, J. S. (2003). Learning and teaching: Knowles' andragogy.  
<http://www.dmu.ac.uk/~jamesa/learning/knowlesa.htm>.

### 3.0 What are their needs?

Islam is a religion to protect benefits of the individual and the community and to facilitate the improvement of the conditions of human life on earth. Muslim scholars have classified the human needs into three categories namely the essential (*daruriyah*), the complementary (*hajiyah*) and the desirable (*tahsiniyah*)<sup>3</sup>. These three categories can be further classified into five human needs ie life, intellect, faith, lineage and property.

It is interesting to analyze Maslow's view<sup>4</sup> on the human needs. Maslow has set up a hierarchy of five levels of basic needs and it can be summarized as follows:

- (a) **Physiological Needs**  
These are biological needs. They consist of needs for oxygen, food, water, and a relatively constant body temperature.
- (b) **Safety Needs**  
When all physiological needs are satisfied and are no longer controlling thoughts and behaviors, the needs for security can become active. Adults have little awareness of their security needs except in times of emergency or periods of disorganization in the social structure.
- (c) **Needs of Love, Affection and Belongingness**  
When the needs for safety and for physiological well-being are satisfied, the next class of needs for love, affection and belongingness can emerge. Maslow states that people seek to overcome feelings of loneliness and alienation. This involves both giving and receiving love, affection and the sense of belonging.
- (d) **Needs for Esteem**  
When the first three classes of needs are satisfied, the needs for esteem can become dominant. These involve needs for both self-esteem and for the esteem a person gets from others. Humans have a need for a stable, firmly based, high level of self-respect, and respect from others. When these needs are satisfied, the person feels self-confident and valuable as a person in the world. When these needs are frustrated, the person feels inferior, weak, helpless and worthless.
- (f) **Needs for Self-Actualization**  
When all of the foregoing needs are satisfied, then and only then are the needs for self-actualization activated. These needs make themselves felt in signs of restlessness. The person feels on edge, tense, lacking something, in short, restless. If a person is hungry, unsafe, not loved or accepted, or lacking self-esteem, it is very easy to know what the person is restless about. It is not always clear what a person wants when there is a need for self-actualization.

If we analyze Maslow's views on the human needs, it is observed that his view is derived from Islamic sources and the categories of these basic needs have already been discussed by the Muslim scholars a long time ago. As regard to the necessity of adult learner in

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<sup>3</sup> Hashim Kamali. (1998). Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Kuala Lumpur: Ilmiah Publishers Sdn Bhd. p 395-396.

<sup>4</sup> Maslow, A. H. (1970). Motivation and personality. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Harper and Row.

higher education, they need all the above categories and these includes accommodation, facilities, financial assistance, emotional supports, love and affection and so on and so forth. Therefore, it is important to adult educators to identify the basic needs of adult learners in order to justify their methodology of learning and teaching. Knowledge on this matter is really essential to ensure the effectiveness on the teaching methodology.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

Based on the foregoing discussion we may conclude that the educators should be able to identify who are adult learners, why they are continuing study at university, and what are their needs. Knowing all of these enable the educators to respond to the potential of an individual adult learner. Beside, understanding the approach and learning style of the students may assist the educators towards effective teaching and therefore high quality of students could be produced.