

Causes of the Low Completion Rate of Literacy Courses in the Department of Aboisso, Côte d'Ivoire

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Abstract

Africa is the continent with the highest rate of illiteracy. To meet this challenge, African states, including Côte d'Ivoire, are promoting literacy through campaigns. In response to these campaigns, adults are massively enrolling in literacy centers to learn to read, write and calculate. Paradoxically, many of those enrolled drop out of the centers within three to six months of enrollment. This study was therefore initiated to understand the low retention rate of literacy course participants in Côte d'Ivoire, in the department of Aboisso. It enabled us to interview 62 deserters (21 men and 41 women) and 23 literacy teachers (19 women and 4 men). The results identified as the first cause, the non-achievement or the feeling of not being able to reach the expectations at the time of registration, i.e., knowing how to read and write, for the majority, and knowing how to calculate and speak for the others. In addition to this cause, the learning conditions are not adapted to the adult public, forced for example to sit on desks designed for children. Finally, the last cause of dropout was found to be the lack or inadequacy of teaching-learning strategies specific to the adult audience. Thus, we recommended that all literacy teachers be extensively trained in the application of andragogy principles, so that the adult who commits to learning to read and write regains his or her dignity and the pleasure of learning without frustration!

Keywords: literacy, retention rates, expectations, conditions, learning strategies.

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Résumé

L'Afrique est le continent qui compte le taux le plus élevé d'analphabètes. Pour relever ce défi, les Etats africains, dont la Côte d'Ivoire, encouragent l'alphabétisation par des campagnes. En réponse à ces campagnes, des adultes s'inscrivent massivement dans les centres d'alphabétisation pour y apprendre à lire, à écrire et à calculer. Paradoxalement, nombreux sont les inscrits qui abandonnent ces centres dans les trois à six mois de leur inscription. C'est donc pour comprendre ce faible taux de maintien des auditeurs des cours d'alphabétisation en Côte d'Ivoire, dans le département d'Aboisso que cette étude a été initiée. Elle nous a permis d'interroger 62 déserteurs (21 hommes & 41 femmes) et 23 alphabétiseurs (19 femmes et 4 hommes). Les résultats ont identifié comme première cause, la non atteinte ou le sentiment de ne pouvoir atteindre les attentes à l'inscription, c'est à dire, savoir lire et écrire, pour la majorité, et savoir calculer et parler pour les autres. A cette cause, s'ajoutent les conditions d'apprentissage non adaptées au public adulte, contraint par exemple à s'asseoir sur des tables-bancs conçus pour des enfants. Enfin, la dernière cause d'abandon s'est avérée être le manque ou l'insuffisance de stratégies d'enseignement- apprentissage propres au public adulte. Ainsi, avons-nous recommandé que tous les alphabétiseurs soient amplement formés à l'application des principes de l'andragogie, afin que l'adulte qui s'engage à apprendre à lire et à écrire retrouve sa dignité et le plaisir d'apprendre sans frustrations !

Mots clés : alphabétisation, taux de maintien, attentes, conditions, stratégies d'apprentissage.

1. Introduction and Research Problem Statement

Our earth has 758 million illiterates to date, or 16% of the world's population. It is therefore rightly that the UN has included since its general assembly in September 2015 in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Thus, the nations of the world have pledged to work towards equal access to quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning opportunities by 2030. (Unesco, 2016).

Apart from Afghanistan, which ranks first among the ten countries in the world with the most illiterates, the other nine are all African countries. In order of the most affected countries, they are: Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Benin, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Gambia and Niger. Africa is therefore the continent most affected by the literacy issue.

As for Côte d'Ivoire, the fact that it is not among the Top Ten does not mean that it has no illiterates. Indeed, Côte d'Ivoire has 56.1% of illiterates, which represents more than half of the national population, of which 49.3% are men and 63.2% are women, with 74.4% in rural areas compared to 25.6% in urban areas (RGPH) 2014.

In reaction to this very high rate of illiteracy in Côte d'Ivoire, the State has set up several structures and institutions throughout the country to fight against illiteracy. Better, under the watchful eye of the State, courses

are designed especially for illiterates to enable them to know how to read, write and calculate without distinction of age, sex, religion and social origin.

In response to the efforts of the State, many illiterate adults enroll in these various literacy centers in order to realize their dream of knowing how to read, write and count. Thus, at the national level, the results are very encouraging since we have gone from 56.1% of the illiterate rate to 43.7% in 2019 according to Abidjan.net.

With such an enthusiasm for registration at the beginning of the year, we were entitled to believe in an effective adhesion of the illiterate populations to the dreams of the UN and the State of Côte d'Ivoire to take up the challenge of seeing the rate of illiteracy decrease by 2030.

Paradoxically, we note that despite the decline in the national illiteracy rate, the non-completion rate of those enrolled in literacy centers remains a concern. Indeed, at the end of the year, we observe that barely half of the learners enrolled at the beginning of the year manage to complete the first year of literacy despite the means deployed by the government and the managers of the various literacy centers. What explains the fact that illiterate adults, who consciously and responsibly enrolled at the beginning of the year to learn to read, write and count, abandon this dream before the end of the year? What does the literature say about this?

1.2 Literature Review

The authors consulted for this study show that adult learners abandon a learning project for several reasons, such as learning conditions, new option for another personal project, teaching/learning strategies, etc. In this study, we will limit ourselves to mentioning only a few authors who are interested in the learning conditions and the effect that certain learning strategies have on adult learners.

Meeting Learners' Expectations

Although KNOWLES (1967) is not recognized as the literacy specialist par excellence, we must recognize that almost all of his six principles could well be adapted to the success of all learning, and therefore of literacy. For the sake of brevity, we present here only the first and the sixth and last principle.

Indeed, the first principle of adult education is first and foremost the need to know, and in the context of literacy training, this need to know is to learn to read, write and calculate. Adults who enroll in literacy training are all motivated by this fundamental expectation. When this expectation is not met, learning stops because the adult is no longer interested.

The sixth and last principle concerns the conditions of learning. Therefore, their place is in the next chapter.

Effect of Learning Conditions on Learners

Regarding the effect of learning conditions on learners, KNOWLES (1989) advises that one should consider:

- the teacher's interest in the learner,
- the mutual respect between the two actors (teachers and students);
- the climatic conditions of the room;
- the right choice of modules that are adapted to the learner's needs,
- the applicability of learning to real life situations;
- taking into account the learner's experience;
- the proper involvement of learners in major decisions related to learning, etc.

Regarding the conditions of literacy, (Auerbach & Wallerstein, 1987; Wallerstein, 1983) believe that literacy should be aimed at solving the problems of the illiterate adult. As for (Shor & Freire, 1987; Facundo, 1984), literacy should be a source of liberation for the illiterate adult.

Effect of Teaching-Learning Strategies on Learner

In general, adults do not learn in the same way as children. This is why we believe it is necessary to create strategies adapted to adult literacy. Among these strategies, (Jurmo, 1987) sees the success of literacy in a participatory approach of the learner, the government and NGOs, with the integration of the learner's mother tongue. As for (Hope, Timmel, & Hodzi, 1984; Fargo, 1981), they believe that adult literacy should take into account the psychological aspects of the adult learner, if the goal is to lead them to success.

In general, some authors who have studied the FRERE educator's literacy strategies describe them as conceptual (CHACOFF (1989)), because they are based on themes from their cultures and real experiences in such a way that formal language learning is relegated to the background without altering the final objective, which is their literacy. What can we learn from the contributions of these authors to better explain the issue of the very high drop-out rate of adults who enroll in literacy centers?

1.3 Reference Theories

This work, which essentially concerns adults in a learning situation, is based on the principles of andragogy of KNOWLES (1967) and (1989), which are none other than six basic principles to be respected for an optimal learning of the adult. It is important to know that no one can force a human being to learn. For a better learning, it makes him the desire or the need to learn.

Principle two is based on self-concept, which encourages the teacher-trainer to consider how the adult

learner sees him or herself. Principle three advises using the adult learner's learning experience to better guide him or her toward new knowledge acquisition.

As for principles four and five, they are based respectively on the fact that the adult does not come to learning to please someone, unlike the child. He learns best if the learning proposed meets his current needs in life. Therefore, he is focused on learning that allows the satisfaction of internal desires such as self-esteem for example.

Added in the evening of his life, the sixth principle more or less repeats the other five with more emphasis on the framework in which learning takes place (see page 3 for details).

1.4 Central Research Question

What explains the low completion rate of learners in literacy centers in the department of Aboisso?

This central research question calls for three other questions that we call secondary questions since they are only aspects of the central question.

Secondary Issues

- 1- What impact does not meeting learners' expectations have on their retention in literacy?
- 2- How do the learning conditions of learners in literacy centers in the department of Aboisso negatively impact their completion rate?
- 3- What impact do the teaching-learning strategies of the literacy centers have on the completion rate of learners enrolled in literacy courses in the department of Aboisso?

1.5 General Objective

The purpose of this research is to identify the causes of the low completion rate of students enrolled in literacy centers in the department of Aboisso. From this general objective, two specific objectives follow:

Specific Objectives

- 1- Identify the impact of learners' expectations on their retention in literacy
- 2- Determine how the learning conditions of learners in literacy centers impact their completion rate in the department of Aboisso.
- 3- Identify how the teaching-learning strategies of the literacy centers in the department of Aboisso impact the completion rate of learners

2. Methodology

2.1 Field of Study

The department of Aboisso is located in the southeast of Côte d'Ivoire, and Aboisso, the department's capital, is 116 km east of Abidjan. The capital of the Sud-Comoé region, Aboisso is the last major city before the ivorian border with Ghana.

2.2 Study Participants

The first group of research participants consist of 23 permanent primary school teachers (19 women and 4 men) employed by the government of Côte d'Ivoire. All of them work as part time teachers on the literacy programs.

As for the dropout learners, they were 62 in number among which 41 women and 21 men. They were those who were able to meet during the investigation period, because, if it is easier to meet on going literacy participants, that was not the case for those who had left. Our sample is therefore of the empirical type with reasoned choice.

2.3 Data Collection Method and Instruments

In order to carry out this study, we used a qualitative method which consisted in organizing a series of interviews with learners who had left the literacy centers. As for the instruments, we used two types of interview guide. One guide for the facilitators of the literacy centers and another one for the few deserters we managed to locate.

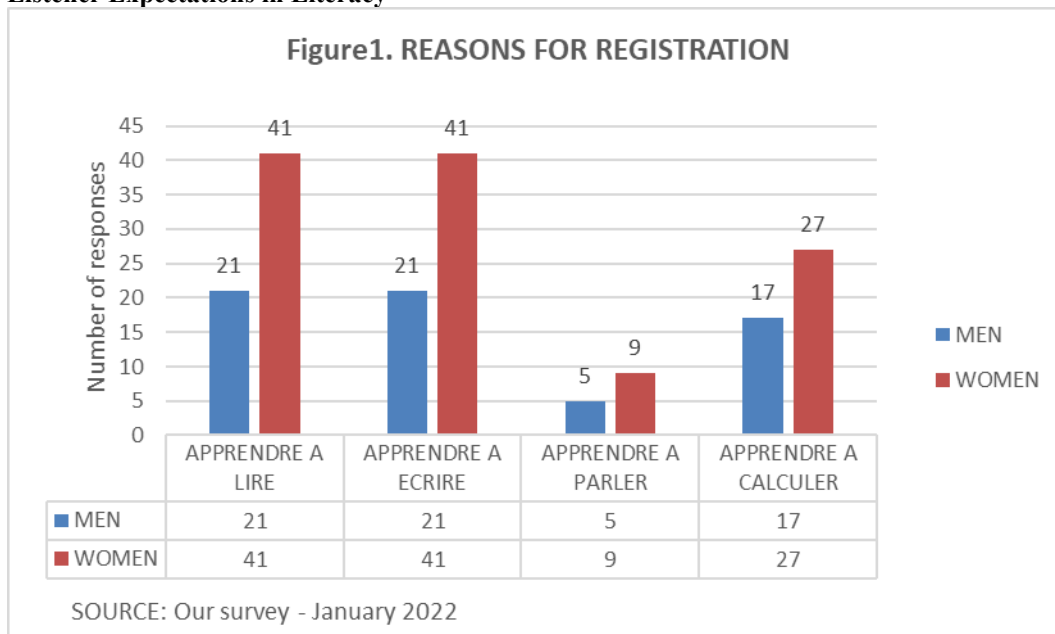
2.4 Data Analysis Method

Although we did not use a questionnaire, we describe our method of data analysis as mixed. In order to process the information collected, we proceeded to analyze the data collected. We then classified the data according to the themes of the deserters' expectations upon enrolment, learning conditions and teaching-learning strategies. Finally, we also analyzed the frequency of the verbal data collected in order to obtain both numerical data and verbatims.

3. Results Presentation and Analysis

3.1 Presentation of results:

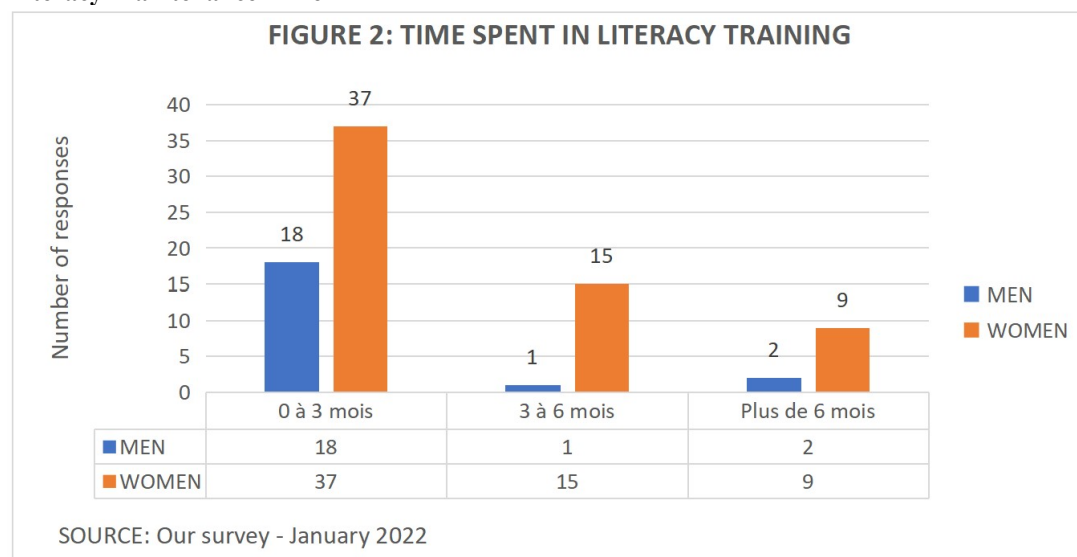
Listener Expectations in Literacy



The vast majority of learners enroll in literacy centers for the dual purpose of learning to read and write. These represent 100% of the population of deserters. Only 22.5% of these same respondents enroll to learn to speak, which means that for most respondents, they have no problem communicating in French. They do not need to be literate to speak French. The latter represent 77.5%.

Learning to calculate is the second reason for enrolling in literacy centers. This is what 70.9% of respondents said. In summary, most adults who enroll in literacy programs expect to be able to read, write and calculate.

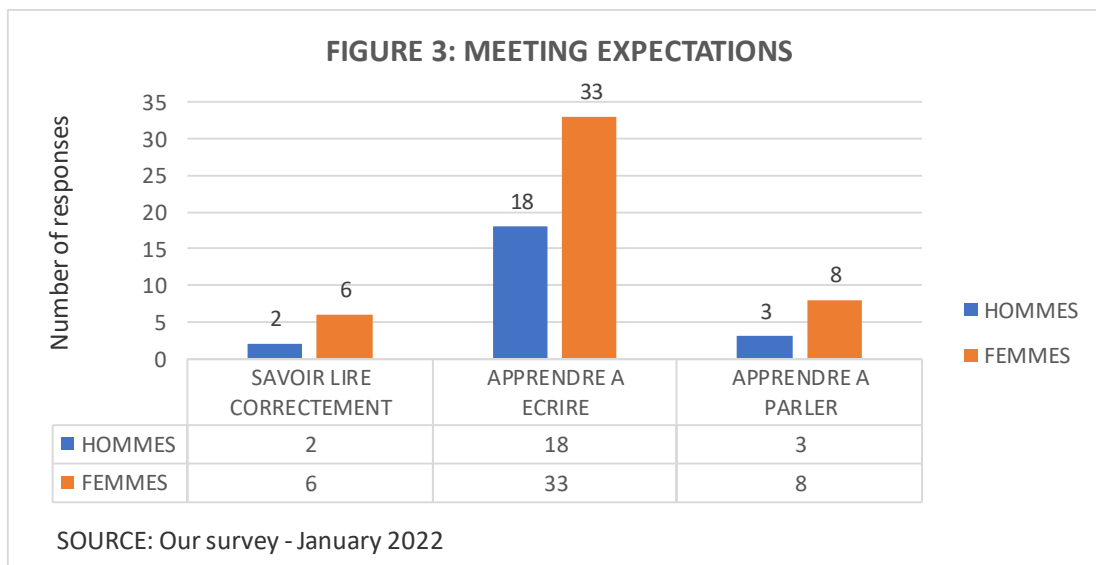
Literacy Maintenance Time



Our results show that 77.67 percent of enrollees stay for the first three months of their enrollment. This figure shows that at least 22 percent of the enrollees desert the literacy centers before the first quarter of their entry.

Up to six months, the retention rate for adults who enroll in literacy classes is 25.8%. This figure means that 74.2% of enrollees stop attending literacy classes in the second quarter of their enrollment. Only 14.51% of enrollees make it past the six-month mark.

Meeting their Expectations



As for the satisfaction of the expectations of the listeners who left the literacy centers, many are not satisfied. Indeed, only 12.9% feel that they can read and write correctly. Almost all of them think they can read and write a little. 17% of them say with a slightly embarrassed look that they cannot read and write at all.

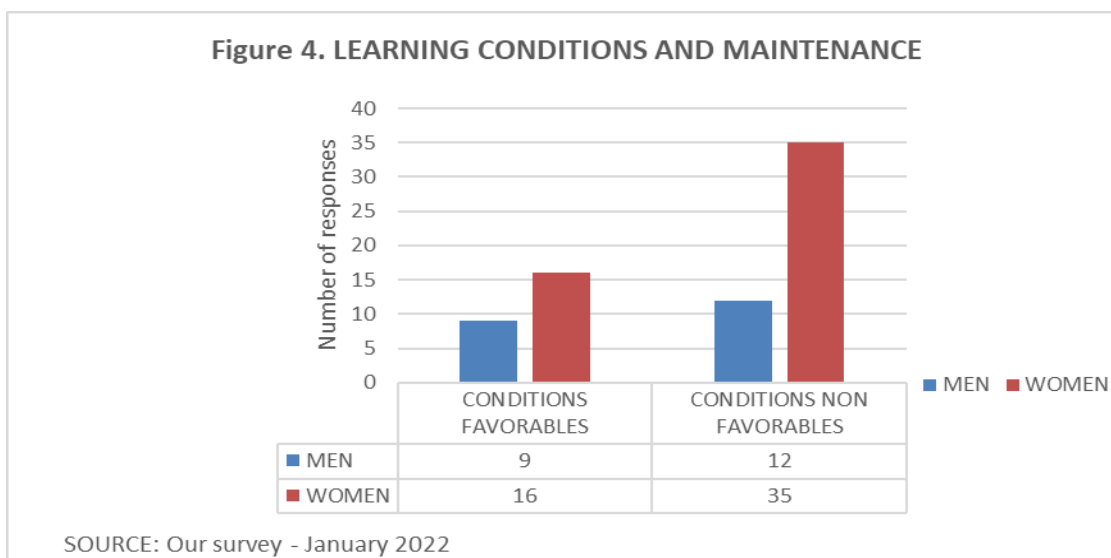
The failure to meet expectations seems to be the main cause of dropout in literacy centers, according to the words of Akossia, a seller at the Aboisso market: *"I came to learn to read and write, but it's hard to do with the children at home. I can't read at home because of the work and the children. I also have to prepare. When you don't do the exercises, the teacher gets angry. We take exam, result no fine. That's why I stopped"*.

Amichia, a cab driver says no different than Akossia, who states *"Me, my head is old. I make my effort, but it's not going well. It's not easy to study when you're old. I leave my car and customers to come, we don't start classes on time, and I lose money. That's why I left."*

What can we say about Jacqueline who says this: *"My husband opened a store for me, and in order to manage it well, I came here to learn to read, write and calculate. Speaking French is not a problem for me. I can read a little, but writing and calculating is not easy. I saw that I was wasting my time after six months. So I stopped"*.

Only 12.9% said they had reached their expectations of being able to read, write and calculate. This is the case of Léontine who says it in these terms: *"I spoke French well before enrolling. Today, I know how to read words, I know how to write a little. To calculate, I know how to use my calculator. I am satisfied with the courses. I encourage my friends to do the same"*.

Learning Conditions and Maintenance

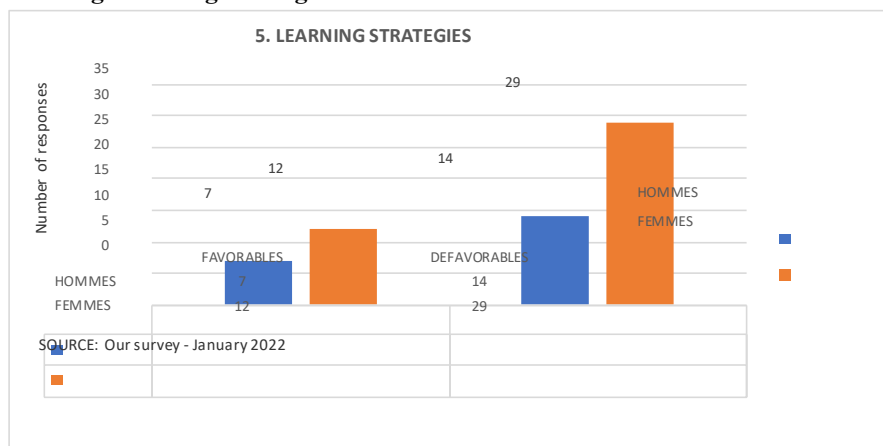


The second reason for the abandonment of literacy projects is the learning conditions in the literacy centers.

No literacy center has its own premises. Everything takes place either in elementary school or in secondary schools. In both cases, the premises are designed to accommodate children, therefore unsuitable for adults. This statement is justified in the following verbatim from Touré: *"How are we going to do? How can I feel comfortable on a school bench with my long legs? It is because I want to learn that I accept this, otherwise..."*.

We therefore understand that no adult can be comfortable on a bench designed for children. In spite of this evidence, 40.3% of the respondents said that the learning conditions were favorable for them. Those who find the learning conditions unsuitable represent 59.67% of respondents.

Teaching-Learning Strategies of Centers and Maintenance:



Most facilitators in literacy centers are primary school teachers. Importing their teaching strategies from primary school to adults is a source of frustration that could negatively impact learning. The following verbatim from Chaka illustrates this statement: *"It is because we do not know that we come to learn. When you don't read well, the teacher talks to you badly. When you don't know something, instead of explaining it to you, she tells you, 'You're so tall, can't you do that? I don't like that, and I left'"*.

Thus, our survey reveals that 30.6% of the respondents have a favorable opinion of the behavior of the literacy teachers, compared to 69.35% who have an unfavorable opinion.

3.2 Discussion of Results

A brief look at our results shows that the literacy centers in the department of Aboisso are mostly attended by women, who represent 66.12%, compared to 33.87% of men, i.e., about one-third of the female population.

Unmet Expectations

Our results also show that all adults who enroll in literacy training have clear expectations, which for some are learning to read and write. For others, learning to read, write and do math. When these clear expectations at the outset appear not to be met, adults leave the literacy centers. When these initial expectations seem difficult to achieve, literacy candidates drop out to avoid wasting their valuable time.

It should be noted in passing that this dropout rate is very high, reaching 74.2% of those enrolled who leave the literacy centers within six months of their enrollment. Akossia's and Amichia's comments corroborate this thesis. *"I came to learn how to read and write, but it's hard to do with the children at home. I have to read at home because of the work and the children. I also have to prepare. When you don't do the exercises, the teacher gets angry. We made composition, it's not that. That's why I stopped."* and *"My head is old. I make my effort, but it doesn't work. It's not easy to study when you're old. I leave my car to come, we don't start fast and I lose. That's why I left."*

As can be seen, the failure to meet expectations is the primary cause of abandonment of the literacy centers. In fact, according to Akossia, she has suffered a double frustration. Not only does she feel that it will be difficult for her to know how to read and write, but she has also suffered the anger of the teacher who would not have been angry if she had some rudiments of adult education. She would have known to avoid housework, especially for women, because of the domestic and family responsibilities.

The literacy teacher's sense of nervousness when homework is not done offended Akossia's self-concept (Principle 2) and she saw this act as a lack of consideration for her person. If Akossia is seen by the teacher as a lazy learner who does not do her exercises, Akossia's self-concept is quite different. In Akossia's self-concept, she is a fighting woman, a mother worthy of respect, who is not only busy in her business, but also at home where she has to face all her marital and family duties. The mistress only had to fulfill her duty of teaching her to read, write and count without requiring her to do homework.

Partial Conclusion

Let us therefore avoid judging the other person on the basis of our own thoughts, which do not necessarily reflect

their reality. The principles of adult education recommend that we consider the way the adult learner sees himself. In this way, we can obtain their support for the achievement of learning goals. The very high dropout rate of literacy learners in the department of Aboisso can be explained primarily by the feeling of not being able to achieve the lofty expectations at the time of registration.

Learning Conditions and Strategies

With regard to the learning conditions of those enrolled in literacy programs in the department of Aboisso, our results showed that 59.67% of those who left the literacy centers were not satisfied with the learning conditions, compared to only 40.3% of those surveyed who said that the learning conditions were favorable for them. Let us stick to our results, but let us note that the desks designed for children do not make the 59.67% who said they were not satisfied with the learning conditions uncomfortable. They also make the 40.3% uncomfortable unless they are all dwarfs.

Like Toure, author of the following verbatim, "*How can I feel comfortable on a school bench with my long legs there? It is because I want to learn that I accept this, otherwise...*", all the adults in these literacy centers experience a certain discomfort on benches designed to accommodate children. Besides this discomfort, there is also the delay noted by Amichia in these terms: "*My head is old. I make my effort, but it's not going well. It's not easy to study when you're old. I leave my car and customers to come, we don't start classes on time and I lose money. That's why I left.*"

With regard to learning strategies, we note that the vast majority of literacy teachers are primary school teachers. At best, they have some knowledge of pedagogy and not of andragogy. Otherwise, the frustration described in the following verbatim from Chaka would never have existed: "*It is because we don't know that we come to learn. When you don't read well, the teacher talks to you badly. When you don't know something, instead of explaining it to you, she tells you, 'You're so tall, can't you do that? I don't like it.*"

With regard to the sixth principle of andragogy relating to the conditions of learning, KNOWLES (1990) recommends that the teacher-trainer take an interest in all learners, create a climate of mutual respect between the teacher and the learners, take care of the climatic conditions of the room, which must be pleasant, and take care of the good choice of modules taught. In the sixth principle of adult education, relating to learning conditions, KNOWLES (1989) recommends that the teacher-trainer should take an interest in all learners, create a climate of mutual respect between the teacher and the learners, take care of the climatic conditions of the room, which must be pleasant, and ensure that the modules taught are well chosen, which must imperatively take into account the learners' needs.

Also, the learning conditions must take into account the applicability of learning to real life situations, while taking into account the learner's experience. Finally, the teacher-trainer must involve the learners in major decisions related to their learning.

Partial Conclusion

In view of all the above, we realize that the literacy centers in the department of Aboisso are very far from meeting the required conditions for quality literacy training. No one can teach or apply principles of which they are unaware. This is why we recommend that all adult trainers and teachers be imbued with the principles of adult education.

4. General Conclusion

This study gave us the opportunity to understand the causes of the low retention rate of literacy students in the department of Aboisso. From this general objective, three specific objectives emerged, the first of which enabled us to discover that when the noble expectations of those enrolled in literacy classes are not met, participants stop attending literacy centers. In other words, when adult learners realize that it will be difficult for them to be able to read, write and calculate, they put an end to their participation in literacy classes within six months of enrollment.

Pursuing the second specific objective of this study, our results made it possible to identify that not all the conditions for optimum learning of literacy students in the department of Aboisso are met with regard to the principles of adult education. In fact, 59.67% judged the learning conditions to be unsatisfactory, compared with 40.03% who were positive. Thus, we came to the partial conclusion that the poor learning conditions observed in classrooms where adults had no choice but to occupy desks designed for children had a negative impact on the literacy completion rate.

Finally, we have also discovered that the teaching strategies of the literacy teachers, which we consider to be closer to pedagogy than to andragogy, are not appropriate for the adult learners who enroll in the various literacy centers in the department of Aboisso. This is why we strongly recommend that all those who engage in adult education or training be thoroughly imbued with the principles of adult education. The reason is that teaching strategies that are not adapted to adults are a source of frustration that eventually pushes those enrolled in literacy programs to put an end to their noble literacy project.

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