

Socio-emotional Selectivity: A Preliminary Analysis of Perspectives of Adult Learners in the University of Botswana

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Abstract

Grounded in the theoretical framework of socio-emotional selectivity theory (SST), this study investigated how the socio-emotional, academic and economic experiences of adult learners in the Primary Education in the University of Botswana affected their academic engagement. This was motivated by the trend of gradual enrolment decline observed by the researchers given the fact that the staff members are not trained as adult educators. The populations of the study were students of the DPE programmes of study. The sample involved ten participants in year 3, ten in year 4 - five participants per each of the two bachelors of education (B Ed) degree programmes and five participants in the masters of education (M Ed) degree programme. These participants were selected through opportunistic and convenience method. The result of the study reveals varied challenges that affect learners' pedagogical expectations and social experiences in the university programmes at both undergraduate and graduate. While they expect to acquire new skills and knowledge for improved work environment when they complete their studies, the academic environment leaves much to be desired.

Keywords: adult learner, socio-emotional selectivity, social responsibility, pedagogical challenge, financial constraint

1. Background

The Department of Primary Education (DPE) is one of the nine departments that make up the present Faculty of Education in the University of Botswana. The DPE is an accomplishment of the Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP). It was conceived in 1981-1982 and approved by Senate at the then University of Botswana and Swaziland. PEIP was a joint undertaking between Government of Botswana and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Evans & Knox, 1991). Its main aim was to focus on teacher development, both pre-service and in-service (Evans, 1993). PEIP was the first major intervention into the primary education system following independence in 1966 (Evans, 1993). The intervention was brought about by the 1977 report of the National Commission on Education which revealed that the performance of primary and secondary schools was unacceptably low as compared to developing and developed countries (Republic of Botswana, 1977). This position is no less than the post-Fordism trend where global competition in the production and marketing of knowledge (Jarvis, 1996) occupy a critical space in national development. As a consequent Botswana like any other country was concerned not just with poor academic performance but also with the type of knowledge and skills at basic education levels hence DPE in UB.

The DPE offers a four year B Ed in primary education and a B Ed in educational management. The programmes attract serving teachers, and senior school managers as well as education officers from primary, secondary, brigades, and other educational institutions in Botswana and regionally. The department also offers M Ed in language education and early childhood education.

Students in this department are adult learners who are professionally qualified and experienced in their work with more than two years of accumulated field work practice. They may have varied reasons for having joined the university full-time programmes, but most of them may be responding to the Revised National Policy on Education imperatives that demand an improved image of the teaching profession (Republic of Botswana, 1994). The policy requires a minimum qualification of a diploma in a primary school classroom. Secondly, it introduced a new type of teacher education programme that has subject specialization and specialized instructional innovations

at primary education level. Such policy proposition may have pressurized teachers to register as adult learners to avoid facing what Illeris (2003, p. 14) calls “social and economic marginalization”.

As its main objective, the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoE&SD) has since the 1977 Education Policy, committed itself to improving the quality and effectiveness of education through the improvement of the quality of serving teachers. To achieve this, “the training of school management teams and the school classroom practitioners for technical mastery of valid managerial and pedagogical skills and ability...should remain an essential commitment towards realization of the quality of education” (Republic of Botswana, 1999, p. 1). To implement their commitment, both UB and MoESD work collaboratively to bring serving teachers into DPE programmes. The challenge however that DPE experiences includes gradual decrease in enrolment, drop outs due to, amongst others, academic failure, health related cases, learners’ commitment to social and family challenges and cases of truancy. There is therefore a need to understand the challenges that adult learners face when they are learning in a pre-service environment.

2. Statement of the Problem

The researchers have observed the gradual enrolment decline in the DPE programmes. Some of the cases of the decline could be attributed to drop outs due to weak academic performance, health related cases, learners’ commitment to social and family problems, and continued cases of truancy. These challenges are further complicated by the fact that DPE staff is made up of members who are not trained adult educators, and can neither claim competence in adult education nor adequacy in understanding the problems and principles of adult teaching and learning.

Against this background, it is imperative for DPE staff to investigate the experiences of their in-service learners in order to have a better understanding of their needs as adult learners. This study is therefore driven by the following research questions:

- a) What socio-emotional challenges does an in-service learner experience that affects his/her study in the DPE programme?
- b) What academic challenges does an in-service learner experience that affects his/her study in the DPE programme?
- c) What economic challenges does an in-service learner experience that affects his/her study in the DPE programme?

3. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Grounded in the theoretical framework of socio-emotional selectivity theory (SST), this study investigates how the academic, social, emotional and economic experiences of adult learners in the Primary Education at the University of Botswana affect their academic engagement. Recognized for being an in-service department, DPE has since its inception in 1980, enjoyed admitting mostly government fully sponsored serving teachers to its programmes. The SST asserts that “when boundaries on time are perceived, presented oriented goals related to emotional meaning are prioritized over future-oriented goals aimed at acquiring information and expanding horizon” (Lockehoff & Carstensen, 2004, p. 139).

Key to this SST thesis is that a shift in chronological age plays a significant part in as far as adult selecting and investing resources in meaningful goals and activities is concerned. This theory partly postulates that as chronological time horizons shrink, adults tend to be particular about the knowledge-oriented goals for knowledge acquisition, career planning and social relationships and other endeavors that will pay off in the future. Perhaps most probable, the in-service adults learners who join university full-time study programme at their late 30s to mid 40s would be oblivious to the truism that time is limited to their side. It is, however, noted that one of the adult learners’ critical challenges, is the “sacrifice of leisure and family time to pursue studies for years” (Laot, 2010, p. 669). Formidable barriers facing adult learners range from “ill-health, changing work commitments, and family circumstances, financial constraints to struggles to engage in a learning environment and culture in which they can feel initially alienated and disoriented” (McAllister, 2010, p. 553). These factors sometimes lead to drop out if learners do not receive attention and support. Adults therefore need to be in an educational environment where they would be assured to acquire knowledge and resources that would enable them to better their socio-economic status towards preparing for their immediate future. They would have therefore developed “a sense of agency to academically succeed...” (Kasworm, 2010, p. 143) especially that time and age may be limited on their side. It is argued that, economically, adult learners consciously participate in educational programmes to succeed, expecting to eventually change aspects of their lives for the better (Crossouard & Aynsley, 2010; Crowther, Maclachlan, &

Tett, 2010). In other words the adult learners' desire to acquire new skills is driven by the need to enhance their career opportunities, financial security and material well-being (McAllister, 2010).

Most universities in market-driven economies are generally youth-oriented academic institutions that also have segments of adult learners. While learners at this level are those reasonably mature people, who would have made their own independent choices for the type of higher academic programmes that are in line with their career dreams, the distinction between an adult and a young learner and their identity in a university seems also obvious. Young learners may be largely those who join a university directly from a secondary school experience in their twenties, and adult learners are those older persons who have a professional qualification and an accumulated practical experience and are only entering a university to upgrade their qualification. Their educational dream is, more often than not, influenced by the desire to increase their opportunity, possibilities and hope, in the not so bright a competitive career and future. They have taken a calculated risk and courage to take a complex journey of being students as well as being committed breadwinner concurrently, a "journey that expands their world of commitment and possibilities" (Kasworm, 2008, p. 28).

There seems to be limited empirical and published research concerning the experiences of both undergraduate and graduate academic in-service learners in Botswana particularly in the UB. However research elsewhere has established that compared to young learners, adult learners required specific intervention, models and services (Crowther et al., 2010, p. 652).

Research has also found that issues that interfere with adults' persistence in learning relate to "difficult social and economic factors" (Crowther et al., 2010, p. 652). These authors further argue that pedagogical practices impact on the progression of adult learners. Positive learner-tutor relationship is paramount for the adult learner. These researchers also found that adult learners are likely to persist with their learning where there is support from staff so that they (learners) establish clear goals which would enable them to identify increased self-efficacy. Further emphasizing the adult learner-tutor relationship, Jarvis (1995) points out that, teachers of adults need "to be aware of what provision is made by their own educational institution and by other institutions in the locality, so that they are able to perform their role effectively" (p. 142).

One of the abnormal phenomena found by researchers is that "adults [were] being taught by teachers as if they were children or young people" (Laot, 2010, p. 669). Furthermore, adults "considered themselves deficient because they were too old and perhaps no longer capable of the intellectual demands of the classroom" (Kasworm, 2010, p. 145). It is also argued that unlike young learners, adults make conscious choices about what to learn and what not to (Illeris, 2003). Factors of identity and social networks (Crowther et al., 2010) also feature in the literature on adult learning. These have been found to instrumentally encourage resilience towards academic engagement. The choices they make are also as a result of identity and social networks factors, and what Crowther et al. (2010) call "community of practice" (p. 660). The argument is that the community of practice provides adult learners with a broader range of opportunities to participate in learning programs.

The semesterization policy of the University of Botswana academic programmes' new approach of electives, general education and optional courses, that requires learners to take courses not just in their own academic departments, but also in other departments and faculties (University of Botswana, 2008) could be seen as a positive response to adult learner needs. The challenge therefore is to establish how the new policy affects the DPE learners and to learn how they perceive their identity in terms of social acceptability as they take courses from different departments and faculties.

4. Research Design and Methods

This article discusses preliminary analysis of the qualitative study findings of an on-going research project. The aim of the project was to improve researchers' understanding of the challenges faced by adult learners in the DPE programmes in UB. The study was spread over a period of a university academic year, which is twelve months.

The populations of the study were learners in the DPE programmes of study, namely B.Ed. (Primary), B.Ed (Management) and M.Ed in various areas of teaching subject specializations. The sample involved ten participants in year 2, ten in year 3, ten in year 4 (five participants per each of the two bachelors degree programmes) and five participants in the M Ed programme. This population was considered adequate for a qualitative study, more so that in-service learners in UB were themselves limited in number. These participants were selected through opportunistic and convenience method (Patton, 2002; Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2004). The study focused on this category of participants because these were adult learners who carry with them emotional, social, academic and economic experiences of being adult learners. These were therefore able to voice out their experiences as DPE students including suggesting some ideas that could improve the staffs' understanding of their needs.

Researchers employed mainly the qualitative methodological approaches of data collection, namely qualitative interviews that include life history/narrative records of personal experiences (Patton, 1987, 2002). These methods enabled them to collect data on challenges faced by the learners through official documentary review and focused group interviews and discussions along the Bogdan and Biklen (1992) model. On average, each individual interview session took 30 to 50 minutes and group discussion sessions took between 1 hour and 1 hour 30 minutes. This time enabled participants to talk about their life histories, discuss their educational and schooling experiences at UB. All interviews were audio-tape-recorded. Data were then transcribed and translated. During this hermeneutic-interpretive process of the two data collection approaches, preliminary analysis was made. Emerging themes, issues and factors affecting adult learners were identified.

Data were analysed through a coding system. It was coded according to themes and programmes of study. The themes were academic = AP; economic = ECP; social = SP; emotional = EP; and training planning = TP. The programmes were coded as Bachelor of Primary Education = P; Bachelor of Educational Management = M, Masters in Educations = G. The bachelor's candidates were interviewed in their year of study groups. For example P3/AP refers to a comment from B Ed (Primary Education) 3rd year candidates on academic challenge. G/ECP identifies a comment on economic challenge as made by a member of the M Ed group member.

5. Findings and Discussions

As much as adult learners are motivated in academic programmes to improve their status and job opportunities they are equally fearful of many challenges as they enroll in a mixed-age academic environment (Illeris, 2003). They are mindful and sensitive to their vulnerability as learners in mixed-aged classroom. In that critical situation, they may require special support structure and system. Like anywhere else where "the majority of [adult learners] ... are forced or persuaded to [enroll] either ... by employers or authorities..." (Illeris, 2003, p. 14), learners in the DPE are this type. In the typical post-Fordist trend, teaching is a symbolic and professional occupation that has to continually improve (Jarvis, 1996). Many teachers in Botswana are therefore upgrading to diploma qualification or beyond to improve and increase opportunities for the nature of an uncertain competitive career and pursuits of personal image in the teaching profession. Kasworm (2008, p. 28) argues that adult learners, typical of those found in UB DPE programmes, "present attitudes, skills, and beliefs of resilience and risk taking..." The serving teachers, for example, are wage earner conscious as Illeris (2003) argues. They enroll in an upgrading programme to earn an instrumental qualification. Inevitably, they should, in their academic journey, be going through emotional, social and economic chaos, turbulence and identity search, which may be coupled with their not so pleasing past learning experiences that could also increase a sense of their anxiety and self-consciousness. Understanding these academic, emotional, social and economic experiences during their full-time studentship life has been the key concerns for this study in order to help those who deliver the adult learning programme develop effective strategies that may be friendlier to their needs.

5.1 Socio-emotional Challenges

Chronological age and social commitments (Laot, 2010; McAllister, 2010) dictate that adult learners should inevitably have a divided span of attention in their academic engagement. Some participants' comments in this study indicate what they perceive as some of their social roles that they value, but could impact negatively on their study.

Sometimes when you try to concentrate in your studies, a message comes from home that your wife or husband is sick, or a child is sick, there is no food, electricity is out... these problems affect us daily (P4/SP).

In addition, participants believe that much as it was befitting to further their studies, they have found that to some extent their social life has been negatively impacted. They cite some of the activities that they find difficult to partake in due to their academic commitment. As a result of their failure to participate in these activities, there is a misconception held by the communities that they either do not want to serve or commit themselves to their social responsibilities. Expressing this view, a participant state:

This has brought a little bit of conflict ... I am a church goer and now people think that I no longer go to church just because I am now educated, but I am trying to tell them that, ... I am a student at University of Botswana, I am not going to attend fulltime as I have been doing. ... Even at home people feel that 'she is now educated and is not coming home for funerals ...may even be deciding to divorce because she is educated than her husband (M3/SP).

It would appear that the participants recognize the significance of their role in the social activities of the communities in which they live. They however, express concern about the communities' expectations that they should fulfill their social responsibilities even after they have gone for further studies, as this puts them under some

pressure. For the participants, trying to fulfill their social roles while continuing with their studies has proved very difficult due to academic workload. One participant in the group noted:

Before I came here I was one of the people who are in the church committee, the main one, and like she was saying, I remember last year, there were some rumors that since I came to school I think I am educated to the extent that I don't participate in church activities and so forth. Though I tried from the beginning to explain to them that since I will be going to school, some activities will be affected because I will have to weigh between going to do some activities and doing my work at school (M3/SP)

The participants further make an observation that while to them these social activities are significant, the university academic staff do not seem to be aware of the value they attach to such community activities and the extent to which this may negatively affect their academic work. They explain that sometimes it is their leadership positions in society that make it obligatory for them to actively participate in such activities, but that this has been adversely affected due to their academic commitment.

My family is from a leading ward and as my father is late, there are certain social expectations that they expect from me. They expect me to attend Kgotla meetings. Unfortunately I am not able because I have responsibilities here that can kind of distance me from the other members (M3/SP).

Financial constraints also affect the student social responsibilities. Participants are of the view that much as they may wish to attend to some of their social responsibilities, financial constraints due to changes that occurred in their salaries is an issue.

You see, people think you are reluctant to attend to social responsibilities. To go for a social meeting it will mean that you should be having money to go there... Just to go around Gaborone means money. Going to attend things like that, it means we are driving, so we are failing to be committed to social issues because of lack of time and money (M3/SP).

The participants express the discomfort that by pursuing further studies they were in a way abandoning their social responsibilities at family level, and the possible consequences that could arise from their failure to fulfill their social obligations. Expressing their fear, the participants stated:

We marginalize our social responsibilities, especially us who have two families, the in-laws and the real families, we have serious problems because the in-laws don't understand, they think that whenever there is a problem ... I should attend ... It affects my studies (M3/SP).

Continuing education especially under symbolic analyst perspective (Jarvis 1996) is necessary to raising ones social status. But the price that adult learners experience in full time programmes has more to do with difficulties of abandoning their social responsibilities. DPE adult learners as learners "sacrifice of leisure and family time to pursue studies for years" (Laot, 2010, p. 669). As McAllister (2010,) argues they face problems that range from health-related through family calls to community demands; which affect their learning.

Crowther et al. (2010, p. 662) argue that adult learners need learning environments that do not "knock their already fragile confidence, [but one that builds] their self-esteem". In this particular case, participants query the system that does not seem to be supportive and therefore subject them to kind of neglect and humiliation. They comment:

When I first came here I did not know where to go, and how to register. There was no prior information to guide me. I had to be running around not knowing where to find lecturers. It was very frustrating (M3/EP)

On my first arrival here there was nobody to guide me on what to do. I depended on asking people of this and that. As a result I had to move from place to place with little help. I felt belittled and undermined as a result I nearly dropped and went back to my work (G/EP)

They make some suggestions regarding the extent to which the university could intervene to help them reconcile their social responsibilities with their academic work.

I know there is a Guidance and Counseling Unit within the University, but I don't think most of us know even where it is and its purpose. Because they never come to us more especially like when you came late (M3/EP).

While participants appreciate the significant role of the guidance and counseling unit and other support services provided within the university, they feel that much more needs to be done to ensure that such services are more accessible to the students in terms of providing support to their ' social challenges. They suggested:

I think each department or each unit should at least have an attaché from Guidance and Counseling Unit who can at least time and again come to us and talk to us ... and so that emotionally we could time and again be

sensitized on some of the challenges that we may meet during the course. I have seen some people leaving the course because of the social pressures (M3/EP).

Participants point out existence of social distance between learners and support agencies:

When we came here in 2008 we were allocated tutors but we have never used them. Right now ... I have never met my tutor, not that I don't have social problems, I have social problems but I never talk to him about it (M3/EP).

Like undergraduate learners, graduate too experience a communication structural vacuum. They feel isolated and kind of disconnected from any support services. They commented:

When we have grievances we do not know where to go. You see, we meet in the evening and all the university offices are closed and therefore we have nowhere to channel our grievances and this causes us anxiety (G/EP).

In terms socio-emotional identity, adult learners perceive themselves as the more experienced and therefore don't gain much from the inexperienced young students whom they attend some courses with. The following are some of the comments:

I don't see the point in combining with form five students...If we mix up with these young ones who are aspiring to what we are ... they don't know what we are talking about...(P4/EP).

There is a perception about us ...they refer to us as 'Bo-mature' meaning mature entry student and often wonder why we are at the university at our age. One actually feels misplaced (M3/EP).

I had some problems registering for some electives because I was told that 'you can't register because you are not from this faculty' ... that made me feel discriminated against (M3/EP).

When it comes to the SRC, the body which speaks for the student community, you find that adults are not part of it. It's only the young ones who are involved. Even issues that are discussed are not relevant to us (M3/EP).

Reflected in the emotional challenges faced by the students are issues related to identity and stigma. In an environment that is predominantly pre-service, and where a majority are younger learners, adult learners find themselves disadvantaged in a number of ways. For instance, they lack computer skills and so they are unable to compete with the youthful learners whose skills are more advanced. They find it difficult to express their views because they are not only a minority but are also embarrassed by their lack of skill in comparison to the younger learners. They have phobia to take courses in classes which are dominated by younger learners. They feel that some staff members too use language that kind of ridicules them. In spite of these challenges, the orientation to services such as guidance and tutoring system is not readily accessible to many of DPE adult learners. It should be noted however, that when students have both interests in what is to be taught and access to interesting academic materials, learning, motivation, effort and attitudes will improve (Knowles, 1984).

5.2 Academic Challenges

In view of the fact that knowledge is seen as marketable as well as informational commodity necessary in this post-Fordist era (Jarvis, 1996), adult learners prefer to participate in academic programs that relate to the knowledge and skills needs. Across all programmes, participants point to their pedagogical expectation of what the university should provide them with in order for them to graduate from the institution as learned people. As much as they aim to succeed academically (Kasworm, 2010) they are more concerned with the acquisition of new knowledge, ideas and skills which they would, upon completion, use in the field to improve their work (Illeris, 2003). They comment:

I am much on learning, though I also go for marks, I know I have to pass, but I shouldn't just pass to get a certificate, I need to get a certificate with some knowledge, ideas and skills, so I take knowledge skills and ideas to be more important than marks ... that's my expectations (M3/AP).

The way we are taught does not help us develop. There is more assignment and less seminars, workshops. We need teaching that gives us skills which will help us improve our professional competencies (G/AP).

We are not saying theory at masters' level is not important. What we are saying is that it should relate to the expectation of our work place (G/AP).

We like emphasis on research that is where we learn new skills that can be applied in our work place (G/AP).

Expressing the same pedagogical challenges concerning their expectations of the university academic programmes, participants across programmes state:

I am not really bothered about marks as long as what a lecturer awards me is supported by comments ...but other lecturers issue marks and no comments. You don't learn from them, you find one tick across the page without any comment (M3/AP).

One big problem that we encounter is lack of supervision in our research projects and assignments because lectures take a long time to mark assignments and give feedback. The other frustrating thing is that they just put marks without comments (G/AP).

In addition, participants express the desire to score higher marks. They argue:

I think learning is the main thing, but at the same time marks and learning are two sides of a coin so I want to learn as much as possible and I also want to get the desired marks so that I could complete my program (M3/AP)

I have realized that some of us are choosing courses after hearing that marks are dished there or there is no examination. For example, if there is a course where you can get 90% and upwards, some people will do it because they want to pass (M3/AP).

The semesterisation system is well understood and could be advantageous to adult learners, particularly on choosing electives and options. However, reflective of lack of fit of some courses, coupled with lack of academic guidance and fear for underperformance is the following comments:

There is this course MGT 400, it's a Strategic Management Course. Some of our colleagues were reluctant to take that course because some told them that it is taxing. Now they opted for the other courses where marks are easy to get (M3/AP)

I try to choose options and electives which will help me at the workplace, for example, MGT 400 which is talking about Strategic Management. But now I realize that it is much on marketing than what I expected... I want to gain experience, which is going to help at my workplace as well they are expecting a lot from me (M3/AP)

There is no one to guide us on elective and optional courses. When you come here you are given forms. You rely on those forms to pick up the courses, only to realize that when time goes on that you have not taken a wrong course. You find yourself in a lot of confusion when it's late to change (P4/AP).

To balance between the needs of the workplace and the desire to succeed in the academic programme is a dilemma facing adult learners hence their conscious choices (Illeris, 2003). This reflects in this comment:

Everyone considers how a course contributes to ones development. If we were to choose within the department, then we would choose courses which are relevant to what we are doing. So if you have to choose from outside, you can't choose a difficult course otherwise it can affect my GPA, I choose any course that I know it will be easy for me to get more marks, rather than choosing an elective where I get less marks (M3/AP).

The language used in business departments where we take our optional or elective courses is completely Business...One time I asked the lecturer to relate the content to our environment (P4/AP)

Adult learners want skill-based pedagogical approaches, and theories taught to relate to different working environments so that they understand them better. Identity and networking build as adults re-direct their collective efforts to learn (Crossouard & Aynsley, 2010; Crowther et al., 2010). They commented:

The other thing which I have observed is that management students just go for a course because most of them are there. If I get to the course like let me take Art, if I come to the Art room and see that there isn't anyone from management, I am not going to sit there, that is one problem we have (M3/AP).

You want to identify yourselves. Like when you go to these other electives, you decide which one should you take so that you always have friends to discuss with ...of course it has a danger because now there is no diversity to learn other things, it will be like working with same people from first year to last (M3/AP).

Graduate learners fault lecturers for lack of fulfillment of their contractual promises in terms of time management and lack of courtesy to notify learners when classes or tutorials were called off. They comment:

Some M Ed lecturers only keep us for an hour instead of three hours. We don't know as to whether it's because of their workload or they are tired in the evening or its lack of commitment. Sometimes some don't even turn-up for lectures and they do not give notice about their absence (G/AP)

Participants also observe that, the quest for quality and relevancy of academic programme is paramount to the consciousness of adult learners. They compare their current programme with the previous ones. Those who studied educational management found the content they study at M Ed as a repetition of the B Ed. They also point out that

the pedagogical approaches are less advanced than what they experienced at undergraduate level. Adult learners are in favor of practical, flexible, experiential, affective and pedagogical approaches.

Learners are also alert to the need for technological innovativeness of education. They are however worried about some difficulties in accessing computers.

We don't have enough computers for the students. The UB library is fully packed and the department one is forever fully occupied (P4/LR).

Adult learners face many academic challenges that impact on their resilience towards academic engagement (Crowther et al., 2010), that are not understood by many lecturers. These range from inadequate information concerning courses to take and how these courses are scaled through pedagogical practices to shortage of learning technologies. Procedures used to choose a course is of great concern to them.

5.3 Economic Challenges

Balancing academic commitment and the economic demands remains an obvious issue in any adult education full-time programmes (Crowther et al., 2010; McAllister, 2010). This study establishes the challenges participants experience in their second year as full-time students soon as they start to draw half salary in the monthly income. They express concern about the adverse effect such financial constraints have had on their academic work. Their decision to go for further study meant that they had to forfeit part of their salary and consequently do not have sufficient funds to secure some of their basic needs. The following comments were made:

The allowance we get is very low, putting us in a very difficult situation. Rent is very high, transport on daily basis is also very high, so it is difficult to survive as a student. It affects our performance. (P4/ECP)

It affects the costs on us if at all you have got to have some notes and you don't have money to go and photocopy you don't feel free because you don't have a computer at home where you can put these and read, so lack of money impacts on our education (M3/ECP).

As I came a single parent a mother of 4, having grand children and other people to take care of , coming here, myself I nearly dropped... because I had a loan and then went into half salary...(M4/ECP)

As reflected in the participants' experiences across all the years of study, adult learners have multiple economic and other non-school-related commitments and responsibilities that they must also attend to while pursuing their educational goals. According to Kinsella (1998), the percentages of students who spend time on responsibilities outside of class is as follows: ...house work - 85%, childcare- 41%, adult care- 23% and homework and internships - 17% ... and these results at least gives educators some idea of the reasons for retention problems. Other barriers may include inability to obtain financial aid and poor financial planning as reflected in these comments:

When you are on half-salary, it means you are doing away with whatever project you wanted to do at home, and there is no way you can perform to your best ability (P4/ECP).

I am a full-time student but now I decided to go back to work at the end of this first year. I don't want to be on half salary. I have projects to complete and cannot manage them with half salary (G/ECP)

To be a full time student with little source of income such as half salary is a problem. I remember two of my colleagues dropping out of the programme because they couldn't survive with half salary (G/ECP).

Adult learners need close support because the economic problems they encounter can adversely affect their academic progress. This is for the more reason that Crowther et al. (2010, p. 662) argue that adult learners need learning environments that do not "knock their already fragile confidence, [but one that builds] their self-esteem".

6. Conclusion

Inevitably, numbers of adult learners, returning to schools particularly as a response to post-Fordism (Jarvis, 1996) has increased for numerous reasons commonly associated with the need for job retraining. This trend has caused an influx of adult students in universities as exemplified by DPE programmes. Adult learners return to school either as full time or part time students while maintaining responsibilities such as family and other social responsibilities of adult life (Crossouard & Aynsley, 2010; Crowther et al., 2010; Kasworm, 2010) and somehow they are caught between these competing roles. This study confirms the literature (Jarvis, 1996) that argues that an adult learner experiences in full time programmes have more to do with difficulties of abandoning their social responsibilities in order to pursue their studies. Returning to school, therefore, often means major changes in their lifestyles. This study also reveals that adult learners face a variety of challenges some of which prevent some of them from making good progress in their academic work. It was evident that adult learners face serious competing socio-emotional challenges such as academic versus societal roles and social engagements versus studentship. These issues impact

on learners' academic performance negatively. Those who persist traverse a very hard socio-economic and emotional terrain that affects their academic engagement.

However, this study confirms, and as has been alluded to in the literature (Crossouard & Aynsley, 2010; Crowther et al., 2010; Kasworm, 2010) that adult learners of any age can learn and succeed in their pursuits if they are afforded the opportunity, assistance and support. Universities therefore need to take into account the socio-emotional interaction, pedagogical approaches and economic situations that continuously occur between adult learners and these settings in academic activities.

7. Recommendation

This study serves as an eye opener to the University of Botswana and in particular the Department of Primary Education. It is therefore recommended that UB and its academic departments should make sure their programme's delivery systems take into account the socio-emotional interactions, pedagogical approaches and economic contexts of adult learners that continuously occur between the learners and these settings in academic activities.

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