

Adult Education In Nigeria: Issues, Perspectives And Challenges

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Abstract

Adult education refers to any educational programme (s) organised for adults and youths regardless of its contents, place of study and also has to be flexible in order to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the beneficiaries and their communities. Adult education is a practice in which adults engage in systematic and sustained self-education activities in order to gain knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values and is expected to address the socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental problems besieging humanity in their various societies. Unfortunately, the goals of adult education as stated by the federal government in the National Policy on Education, have not been properly achieved. Changes and developments in this contemporary world call for a total review and overhaul of adult education. Adult education faces challenges such as poor perception of adult education by the public, marginalization and lack of funding by the government of the day. This paper therefore looks at the concept of adult education, objectives of adult education, contemporary issues in Nigerian educational system, challenges and prospects. Based on the discourse it was recommended that adequate awareness should be given to the general public to enable them to know the importance of adult education; funds should be made readily available and recognition should be given to adult education; the nomenclature of “Adult Education” should be re-visited to a name that will be acceptable and known by all ages in the society. In conclusion, adult education should be re-positioned to meet the ever increase demand of the present time in order to contribute meaningfully to national development.

Keywords: *Adult, Education, Adult education, Nigeria, Challenges and Prospects*

Introduction

Education is a process whereby individuals are prepared to fit into the social system in which they live. Education is a vital instrument for social, economic, technological and political transformation and development of any society. It is the act or process of imparting

or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life. Education is the process by which all human beings acquire beliefs, knowledge, and skills as they go through life. Education remains the key to human development. It is the driving force for meaningful developments in every human society. It goes on perceptibly and imperceptibly, formally and informally and has been regarded as the main process of transmitting the dynamic culture and socialising individuals throughout the ages. The goal of any educational system is to provide or develop a balanced individual capable of surviving in his environment and contributing meaningfully towards the survival of that society to which the individual belongs.

Adult education is a broad educational concept encompassing diverse educational programmes. It involves a range of programmes and activities conducted by different agencies, having different goals, contents and different methodologies. Thus, the concept “adult education” does not conjure up any specific programme of education. As an amorphous concept, it should not be approached from a narrow perspective in order not to lose sight of important contributions of different collage of organizations, agencies and programmes within it. Adult education is one of the principal professions that can take adequate care of socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental problems of the adults. The success of adult education in terms of achieving its goals as stated in the Federal Republic of Nigeria: National Policy on Education (2004) cannot be over-emphasised.

Adult education changes the social and psychological minds of adults more than any other profession, instils lost hope in them and liberates them from their prejudice of seeing themselves as not beings that are capable to learn (Ayantunji, 2019). Adult education awakens adult learners to become aware of their environmental (social, economic, cultural and political) and psychological potentials and hidden abilities. It also exerts enormous influence on the larger society in terms of national development. Adult education continues from where the teacher in the formal school system who rigorously inculcates in the individual the desire for knowledge, understanding and education stops. Adult education is concerned not with preparing people for life, but rather with helping/assisting people (adults) to live more successfully as useful and acceptable members of their societies and contribute meaningfully to the development of those societies (Olajide & Ayantunji, 2016).

Adult education educates adult learners who are parents/guardians on the better ways of managing the available resources to achieve socio-political and economic success in their

life endeavours and also make referrals which assist other individual personalities and institutions in dealing with human problems as well as the society in which they find themselves. Adult education stands between the adult learner, the community and policy makers in human societies so much than any other professional. The adult educator knows the problems which inhibit effective adult teaching/learning and effective administration of adult education industry. Adult education is the only profession that assists adult learners effectively in their efforts to learn. Okafor (1991) states that:

Thorough knowledge of the basic principles of teaching and learning and the skills to apply those principles in teaching/learning situation, adequate knowledge of the learner and the factors that determine the quality of the learner's response in the educative process, adequate knowledge of the value constructs that motivate the learner and the capacity to assist the learner to acquire essential attitudes and modify negative ones.

The above assertion reveals that adult education is a unique profession. Unlike every other profession adult education deal with “adult human materials” and environmental problems which give the individual a feeling of joy, fascination, pride and enthusiasm. Unlike other professionals, working with “adults” establishes enduring and infectious impressions which engenders in adult learners the practical realisation of theoretical formulations inherent in adult education.

Unfortunately, the adult educator in adult literacy centres receives meager pay which is not commensurate with services rendered, works in dilapidated and unstimulating environment without the necessary teaching/learning facilities. The adult educator suffers stress, insults and violence from this clientele and government in handling adult education programme. This makes him feels disappointed in his profession. Adult education programmes continue to operate mainly as disparate, peace meal activities that are not integrated into coherent purposeful strategy in pursuit of a relatively development vision (Nnazor 2005). All these in a way consistently truncate adult education profession. The adult educator feels bad as a result of his genuine commitment to do good by transforming his learners and consciously making the society a better place for living. The consequence of all these is that adult education had suffered devaluation which makes people develop a low sense of esteem especially when compared with other professions like medicine, law, engineering and so on.

In the face of all this, adult education and its environment is generally faced with challenges. Adult education has been neglected by the government irrespective of the fact that it is the adult personnel of this country who are already at the production sectors and who will eventually transform this country from what it is today to achieve its developmental target of 7-point agenda of the late Umar Musa Y'ardua (Maduka, 2010).

The objectives of Adult Education are not achievable in an environment where majority of the nation's population especially the adults who are in the production sectors of the economy are illiterates. Illiteracy is associated with underdevelopment, instability, low productivity, low income, poor health, high poverty and mortality rates (Nzeneri, 2010). It is the recognition of these ills that a one-time chairman of National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education in Nigeria, eke (1992) succinctly puts it that:

A cursory look at the political climate of the world shows clearly that regions of mass illiteracy are generally regions of instability, economic and political underdevelopment. Economically, an illiterate is on the periphery, politically he is completely in the dark.

The human race in this contemporary world looks up to Adult Education system for right answers to the problems of the 21st century and the key for Adult Education to make positive responses lies in the quality of Adult Education available to the people. The 21st century has opened up more opportunities for people to venture into areas that were before now classified as no go areas. Nzeneri (2010) succinctly viewed that our 21st century is characterized by an upsurge in information communication technology which dictates the pace of development and, surely one has not stopped talking about technological transfer.

The 21st century through adults' education should open more opportunities for adult education to venture into those no-go areas. The physically challenged adults and volatile youths should be given a sense of belonging just like other individuals. Yesterday it was the problem of youth being restive in the Niger Delta region and kidnapping all over the country. Today, it is the problem of Boko Haram bombings and killing of thousands of innocent citizens and destroying property in the Northern part of the country. One can say categorically that a review of adult education in Nigeria can provide a bridge and veritable platform through which the promises and challenges of the 21st century can be adequately addressed.

Therefore, it is very beneficial to focus on different perspectives not minding their organizational bases. This paper attempts a definition of adult education,

Adult Education

In the Federal Republic of Nigeria: National Policy on Education (NPE), (1981), Adult and Non-Formal Education is defined as consisting of functional literacy, remedial, continuing, vocational, aesthetic and civic education for youths and adults outside the formal school system. In another paragraph the objectives of what is termed “adult and continuing education” are listed. This document confuses the concepts of adult education, non-formal education and continuing education. Although these concepts are related yet they are semantically different. One could assume that the whole section is on Adult Education because all are within the purview of adult education. For instance, while adult education refers to any programme of education designed for people regarded as adults in their societies, non-formal education means any educational programme organised outside the formal school system. On the other hand, continuing education refers to any programme, above the primary school level provided for adults after the cessation of formal schooling. The diverse nature of “adult education” creates the problem of definition as Ziegler (1966) as cited by Schroeder (1970) correctly observes that:

One cannot speak of “adult education” as one can speak of the public elementary and high school programmes, and expect a common understanding of what is meant by the term. For in addition to the range of activities which comprise adult education, this branch of education has been and continues to be conducted by a multitude of contrasting institutions and agencies each providing according to its own plan (or) method.

To avoid the mistake of proffering a definition that will be so broad as to include what should not be there, or one too narrow as to exclude elements that are necessary, one should therefore tread safely in any attempt at definition. Hence, one feels that adult education could be operationally defined as any educational programme, of whatever description, dimension, purpose, content or methodology, designed for people regarded as adults, considering mainly the criteria of mental maturity and social role.

Perhaps, it is necessary to clarify the phrase “considering mainly the criteria of mental maturity and social role”. As a matter of fact, the concept “adult” is definable using the criteria of chronological (age) maturity, physical (size) maturity, biological (development of secondary sexual characteristics) maturity, mental/psychological (thinking reasonably and logically) maturity and social role (being responsible for oneself and/or for others) (Olajide & Ayantunji, 2016). While variability can occur in physical, chronological and biological criteria, the mental maturity and social role criteria are very reliable and therefore mostly used by many societies. Even these two criteria relate and can be coalesced into social role because it is one who can think logically and reasonably that can be responsible for himself or herself and/or for others. Adult education thus, as a concept is one most difficult to define. Yet, people define it from different perspectives. However, most writers seem to agree that adult education is the education geared towards the adult. This gives rise to the question “who is an adult”.

An adult as a concept, just like adult education, has been defined by many different authors and writers from different perspectives. Some use the biological parameter in defining it, while others use the chronological, historical, economic, psychological, political and social parameters in defining who an adult is (Olajide & Ayantunji, 2016). One may ask “what then can be said about the concept of an adult”? An adult may be seen as one who has achieved full physical development and is expected to have the right to participate as a responsible homemaker, worker and member of a society.

An adult is a person who is physically and psychologically mature, and the individual is socially, economically, politically, culturally and environmentally responsible (Nzeneri, 2010; Olajide & Ayantunji, 2016). Looking at the above definitions of an adult, two key words exist, which are maturity and responsibility. He also informs that in advanced countries an adult is one who has attained the voting age of twenty-one (21) years and more, while in developing country like Nigeria, he is one who has attained the voting age of 18 years (Olajide & Ayantunji, 2016). Adult therefore, is a person regarded as such by society to which he/she belongs. One may say that the definition of who an adult is culture referenced. This depends on who a particular society considers to be an adult in that society.

Further, adult education, like ‘who an adult is’, has varied definitions from different authorities and writers. However, UNESCO in her international conference in Nairobi, Kenya, (1976) as reported in Nzeneri (2010) defines adult education as:

The entire body of organized educational process, whatever the content, level and method, formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications and bring about changes in their attitude or behaviour in the two fold perspectives of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development.

The above definition is broad and encompassing in the sense that it does not only define adult education but it also defines its content and scope. Simply put, adult education is the education (formal, informal and non-formal) given to any person regarded as an adult by society in order to socially, economically, and culturally improve and empower him/her, so that the person will be able to contribute meaningfully as a useful and the acceptable member of society. It is education based on the needs of the adult.

One universally acknowledged truth is that adult education proffers solutions to all human problems. It also offers a great deal of socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental opportunities to people. Adult education provides employers in different sectors of the economy with qualified and sustainable skills and manpower which service the economy and provide basis for rewarding the adult members. In the words of a one-time Director General of UNESCO as reported in Omolewa (1985):

It is not the children of today who hold the present destiny of Africa in their hands, it is the adults. So, it is only by establishing effective communication with the adult population, by helping them to adjust to a rapidly changing world that an immediate impact can be made on urgent problems of society and essential progress to be brought about.

This view is very true because it is the adults who occupy the production sectors of our economy not children who by their education are for the future. Adult education has been deployed to solving different situational problems in different societies of the world. Eheazu (1998) is in agreement with this situation when he maintains that:

Strongest and desirable role Adult Education can and does play is in redressing injustice, deprivations, and oppression suffered by victims of pseudo-equalitarianism and insincerity of purpose in the provision made for the general good in education training and functional learning.

With the world becoming a global village, adult education helps to breakdown stereotype ideas and reduces prejudice, injustice, deprivation and oppression. By implication, this means that adult education in addition to being a tool for global peace and harmony makes the educated adults to be more sophisticated and polished in their chosen profession. People who are more educated know why they are not supposed to make prejudice comments and consequently disguise their prejudices (Farley, 2010). Adult education should be geared towards solving the problem of injustice, deprivation and oppression which will in turn bring peace and harmony among adult members of the country. It will solve these current problems of kidnapping, youth restiveness and indiscriminate bombings in the country.

The Objectives of Adult Education

According to the National Policy on Education (2004) the objectives of adult education are to:

- i. provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education,
- ii. provide functional and remedial education for those young people who did not complete secondary education,
- iii. provide in-service, on the job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills,
- iv. give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment, and
- v. provide education for different categories of completers of formal school system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills on income generation activities like carpentry, tailoring, knitting, pomade and soap making and local craft.

As laudable as the above can be, adult education has not succeeded in achieving the above objectives. Adult education should be re-positioned to excessively launch the present adults

into the orbit where they can respond to the challenges of the 21st century and make meaningful contributions to national development.

Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Educational System

The level at which adult education is been financed in Nigeria is not impressive, owing to the fact that the bodies in charge of formal and informal education in Nigeria are not fully implementing policies neither are they executing it. In the face of all this, adult education and its environment in this 21st century is generally faced with challenges. However, looking at the political climate of the world shows clearly that regions of mass illiteracy are generally regions of instability, economic and political underdevelopment. Economically, an illiterate is on the edge and politically he is completely in the dark. Therefore, education is a vibrant sector in economic development, with this fact one still need to consider the spread of education among dependent population, and how reliable the level of Nigeria formal education is affecting adult learner. The question one may ask regarding the population of adult that are undergraduate running part-time programmes in university is that, are they productive? In what level have they been able to affect the nation's productivity level?

As a matter of fact, Adult Education should not be neglected in every society of the world, for the reason that adults are the people affecting the GDP. Policy makers and the planners of adult education program in Nigeria need to incorporate into adult education those innovations which are peculiar to the 21st century.

A fundamental requirement which adult education programme planners need to incorporate into its schedule is the knowledge and practice of information and communication technology. The 21st century is characterised with exposition of knowledge and hi-technology which has aided development in different sectors. A century where communication and infrastructural facilities such as telephones fax and computer networking's are tools that are turning the world into a global village. Virtually, all sectors of human endeavour in the 21st century have become technology driven. This has resulted in a shift from "industrial era to information era". Synonymous with the century is its ability to reach people irrespective of distance, introduce changes to human problems.

Adult education should not lag behind in this era of information and communication technology and knowledge exposition. A foundation value which adult education should

incorporate and integrate in the 21st century programme is adult education which is capable of educating the adult members of the Nigerian community a culture of peace and harmony. In recent past, events in some states show that educational institutions where the youths and young adults are, have turned out to be breeding grounds for violence and educated adult elites employ the services of these young adults to execute assassination of opponents, rig elections, rape, kidnap and lead rebellious gangs, commit fraud and pen robbery and so on. These are some of the actions which adult education, which is purely for liberation, development and peace should challenge.

Another issue of fundamental importance which needs to be addressed at this period is that proper attention should be given to adult education by the three tiers of government in line with the global concern for eradication of illiteracy. There should be a holistic approach to adult education. The three tiers of government should allocate adequate finance to adult education programme especially literacy and continuing education programmes because there cannot be progress where a nation that the children and adult parents are illiterate. The objectives of Education for All (EFA) cannot be achieved without having almost everyone especially the adult populace literate. Among this group are nomads and migrant fishermen and so on. Therefore, government should as well provide adequate funds to take care of adult literacy including the little stipend for instructors, which constitute serious disincentive for regular attendance in adult literacy classes.

Further, the issue of lack of adequate instructional materials and qualified personnel to handle adult literacy centres should be addressed. Finally, it must be emphasised that overhaul in adult education in general is very essential for the generation and sustainability of new knowledge that can be in harmony with globalization in this contemporary world.

The challenge of poor public perception of adult education is considered another serious issue of adult education in Nigeria. The poor public image of adult education field as an area of study for the aged people is undoubtedly partly responsible for its low patronage as a discipline in Nigerians Universities (Ayantunji, 2019). There must be adequate information about adult education in order to stimulate significant interests of people in the field as an important area of study that offers many opportunities to people.

Lastly, is the issue of “nomenclature”. It is general belief within the society that once adult education is heard, people believed it is the study or course for the aged or elderly within the society. There should be adequate awareness that adult education is not necessary

for the aged or drop-out of school but rather it is the field that embraces diverse areas as vocational education, functional education, formal education, informal education, non-formal education, high school equivalency, parent education, adult basic education (including literacy training), physical and emotional development, practical arts, applied science, and recreation as well as the traditional academic, business, and professional subjects. It is a life-long learning. Therefore, the issue of the name “adult education” should be addressed.

Challenges

Adult education programme is facing a lot of challenges as follows:

1. Failures of the UBE act to give adequate recognition to Adult and Non-Formal Education as a key sector of basic education.
2. Funding: the budgetary allocation to NFE at all levels of government is grossly inadequate, especially when compared it with the Formal sector. More importantly NFE is excluded in the share of two percent Consolidated Fund meant for Basic Education in spite of the policy provision. However, it is noted that there is problem of accountability and transparency in the management of funds allocated to NFE.
3. Poor remuneration of facilitators: most states and LGAs do not pay the facilitators regularly; the 7500 naira stipulated in the benchmark meant for the remuneration of the facilitators cannot be paid by almost all the states. In some cases, even facilitators are not being paid for so many months. This is a big threat to the success of the NFE. Facilitators receive meager pay which is not commensurate with the services rendered, works in dilapidated and not conducive environment.
4. Inadequate number of qualified facilitators: according to NMEC (2008): Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) should be the minimum teaching qualification in compliance with the provision of NPE to ensure the quality delivery in Adult and Non-Formal Education. Statistics revealed that there are still Grade II teachers and even less qualified personnel teaching in the NFE centers and are not fully trained in the andragogical methods.
5. Poor record keeping: there is a problem of record keeping in NFE. This has seriously affected the database needed for adequate planning and implementation of NFE intervention programmes. This also affects the tracking of learner’s performance and transition from one level to the other.

6. Poor attitude of the target group: yearly statistics of NMEC have shown that most of the targeted groups have not really embraced the NFE programme. It is on record that an average of 1.7 million learners out of over 44million projected learners had only embraced the programme. At this rate, it will take 22 years to achieve EFA goals.
7. Inadequate and irregular monitoring of programmes: monitoring is vital ingredient for successful implementation of NFE as such it should be integrated in the programme action plan. Adequate funds are not provided and required information about the status of the programmes is not available.
8. Inaccessibility: all citizens should have the opportunity to develop themselves throughout their life at whatever age, to acquire the knowledge and know-how to better pilot their life transition, to improve their quality of life, to develop their potential, to experience the joy of learning. In view of this the rise of fees is becoming a huge problem in Nigeria. This causes a lot of problems of low adult participation in adult education programmes

Prospects

1. Increase in productive capabilities: a well-educated adult farmer will not only know how and when to apply fertilizers, but will know how to increase his productive capabilities with modern technological system of farming. This will invariably increase the Gross National Product of the country.
2. Increase in the literacy level of the labor force: the contribution in this form is that, within the a given occupation, a better educated person is likely to do a better job than a less educated one, because additional education is expected to make an individual more aware of better ways of doing things. Literacy will help the individual to:
 - a) have a liberal mind and positive orientation towards life and its related activities;
 - b) accept and appreciate changes and innovations which may enhance his productivity;
 - c) improve his health habits which have implication for his effective contribution to the economy; a sickly individual can hardly make any meaningful contribution to the economy;
 - d) generate ideas and information which may assist others to improve their performances within the economy.

3. Reduction in Maternal and Infant mortality rates: literate mothers are more able to look after their own health and that of their children and also to attend to anti-natal and post-natal clinics regularly.
4. Transformation of individuals, communities, entire social structures and societies.

Recommendations

Based on the above issues, perspectives and challenges of adult education in Nigeria, the following recommendations were made:

- Adequate funding: governments at all levels should allocate adequate funds to adult and non-formal education sector in order to carry along its programmes effectively and efficiently.
- More centers and programmes be established and also makes it affordable to all interesting adult learners or in some programmes like the Basic and Post literacy programmes be free at all the states of the Federation.
- As a matter of urgency, the National Assembly should revisit the UBE act in order to incorporate adult and non-formal education as part of it.
- Facilitators' remuneration: payment of facilitators should be in accordance with the minimum benchmark as set by the NFE blue print that facilitators should be paid minimum wage as their remuneration or allowances.
- Recruitment of adequate and qualified facilitators: persons with Nigeria Certificate in Education and specialization in adult education should be employed as facilitators in the NFE centers.
- Establishment of adult education departments in Colleges of Education in Nigeria: Government to encourage Colleges of Education to establish departments of adult education in order to train facilitators in adult education field.
- There should be intensified and sustained advocacy, sensitization and mobilization of all stake holders to support Adult Education in the country.
- More capacity building programmes (pre-service, in-service and on-the-job-training) for Adult Education personnel at all levels should be put in place. Effective programming and implementation would require appropriately qualified personnel with definite schedules of duty.

- Employment of adequate number of staff at all levels to meet the ever-increasing demand of Adult Education in the country.
- Regular and effective monitoring of programmes at all levels. As laudable as the above can be, adult education has not succeeded in achieving the above objectives.
- Adult education should be re-positioned to excessively launch the present adults into the orbit where they can respond to the challenges of the 21st century and make meaningful contributions to national development.
- Make a policy that can allow Nigerians to be educated even when they are not earning income, in anticipation to receive return when those citizens are yielding potential output, in other word are fully employed.
- Awareness campaigns should be embarked upon by relevant agencies such as Agency for Mass and Literacy so as to enable the masses to know the importance of education.
- Adequate structures should be put in place so as to create a conducive environment for learning. Finally, motivation should be given to the adult learners as well as the facilitators.
- The nomenclature of “Adult Education” should be re-visited to a name that will be accepted and known by all ages in the society such as “Life-long Learning and Human Development”.

Conclusion

This contemporary period has better prospects for adult education to move forward with globalization trends. This is because the key to the development of any nation lies in the quality of adults that nation has. It is the adults who will transform the nation, not the children. Therefore, adult education must be a pacesetter to other professions in developmental drive of any nation. There should be a radical overhaul of adult education programmes which is committed with global trends.

Nigeria has more than 28 million learners at primary level, at the Junior secondary enrolled 6.65 million students were enrolled during 2018/2019 school year, and at tertiary level there were about 4.66 million enrolments (Federal Republic of Nigeria: Educational Sector Analysis 2021), Nigeria has made modest but significant progress in the development of formal and youth education. Nevertheless, a country that almost concentrates its

educational investment on youth and formal education is unwittingly failing to develop and utilise its human resources optimally.

Furthermore, considering that knowledge and skills have become the means for individuals and nations to be competitive, the high rates of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria, in spite of the country's natural resources, can be attributed, to a significant extent, to the lack of an education and training system committed to equipping adults to contribute more effectively to social, economic, political and cultural. Government should see adult population as a vital organ that can enhance economic productivity in as much as the categories of people belonging to the crops are within the age of 15-60 (World Bank, 2001). Better policies and more inputs are needed to be input into the society to boost adult enthusiasm towards education, as well as is not necessary mandating them to go back to school but creation of alternative like work-shops that can help their efficiency, also creating a crimeless society, and making every possible provision of vocational outlet to further engage adults will be better.

From the foregoing one can see the adult education trends in Nigeria. It is clear that inadequate funding amongst others is a major factor hindering effective adult education delivery in Nigeria and has led to the continued increase in adult illiteracy to an alarming magnitude even up to today.

The key to the development of any nation lies in the quality of adults the nation has. It is the adults that transform the nation not the children. Adult education has better prospects to move the nation forward and it should meet with the global trends. Adult education should be re-positioned to meet the ever increase demand of the present time in order to contribute meaningfully to national development.

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