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UNDERSTANDING ADULT EDUCATION PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

Essays in Honour of
Professor Kehinde Oluwaseun Kester

Edited by
Kola Kazeem
Kofoworola Adedayo Aderogba
Olufunke Temitope Ogidan
Margaret 'Bola Oni

Understanding Adult Education
Practice in Nigeria

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CHAPTER FIVE

Reflections on Challenges Facing Adult Education Practices in Nigeria: Pre-Independence-2016

H. I. Kuye and D. Ukpabi

Introduction

Nigeria is a multiethnic country with diverse cultural diversities. Nnazor (2005) citing United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP, 2004), described Nigeria as the most populous country in Africa, with a population of about 120 million and endowed with a variety of natural resources. However, between 66 to 70 percent of Nigerians are poor and the rate of unemployment is about 15 percent (UNDP, 2004). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2010), the 2006 population census in Nigeria shows that 19.7 percent of the population is unemployed.

The enhanced education of the population has been the major goal of every country seeking to enhance the productivity of its people. Education has therefore become one of the major areas of investment for economic development. Preliminary evidence indicates that the return of investment in education is often greater than the return on investment in other capital goods (Brookover and Erickson, 1977 in Osokoya, 2008).

Sarumi (2011), citing Ocitti (1994) asserts that education, learning and training are not recent inventions for many ethnic groups of Africa as they are integral part of life and a sort of permanent things among the people of Africa. According to Sarumi (2011), the traditional societies have specific principles, methods and instructional arrangements for education, learning and training. According to Fafunwa (1974),

corroborated by Omolewa (1981), the elders in the traditional African societies engaged in participatory learning. Hence, the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that individuals learnt were to a great extent common to everyone. The advantages of this system as observed by Sarumi (2011) include the fact that education was deeply rooted in the culture of each society so that the individuals were not alienated by the process of the same education.

In Nigeria, the expectations from adult education according to Adesanya (2005), are legion, ranging from eradication of illiteracy, poverty, school attrition, unemployment, disease, crime to humanity, etc. The adult is expected to participate in politics and understand the dynamics of democracy, preserve the environment for sustainable development, create wealth and employment for poverty reduction and partake in learning in order to be literate. No doubt the Nigerian educational system according to Osokoya (2008) has failed to bring about the much needed breakthrough in our developmental quest.

This chapter reflects on the challenges of adult education practices in Nigeria and the way forward with a view to ensuring that it adequately plays the role of a change agent through meeting the local needs of Nigerians through provision of sustainable employment, wealth, democracy and development among others. For the present high rate of illiteracy, unemployment, social problems, challenges/ issues associated with democratic governance, and so on, to be adequately tackled and drastically reduced or eradicated, the challenges facing adult education practices must be addressed. This is because adult education is a change agent which must be provided, promoted, funded and sustained through adequate commitment to its development by the government and other stakeholders.

Historical Review of Adult Education in Nigeria

Traditional adult education is almost as old as human race and has been in existence in Nigeria before the coming of foreign influences (Adeyemo, Folajin and Kuye, 2014). The formal study of adult education began in the United States although the practice of modern adult education was the European brain-child. In 1929, International conference on adult education began when Albert Mansbridge sought

to generate interest in the works of adult education through the first World Conference on Adult Education at Cambridge, with considerable support given to him by UNESCO (Adeyemo et al, 2014). In 1938, the first Ph.D thesis in adult education was produced by Wilbur C. Halenbeck and this academic work gave the discipline a very big prestige which enhanced its status in the academic world (Hallenbeck, 1938).

Britain colonised Nigeria and some other African countries and had no clearly defined policy on education for Nigeria before 1925 (Nnazor, 2005). Education activities in the colony were managed by colonial administrators, in consultation with Christian missions and their offices (Fafunwa, 1974). The Phelps-Stokes Commission was set up in 1922 to look into education in West Africa and Equatorial Africa, including Nigeria. The commission's report titled 'Education in Africa' emphasised the need for a policy on adult and community education stressing the education of the entire community if education was to result in meaningful development. To educate the children at school while the adult population remained largely illiterate and uneducated amounted to a grossly inadequate utilisation of education in development (Fafunwa, 1974).

Using the Phelps-Stokes report the British colonial government issued its first education policy for Nigeria in 1925 which did not address in any significant way community or adult education but rather concentrated on school education. Consequently, a significant opportunity to begin to develop adult education in Nigeria was missed (Nnazor, 2005). After the outbreak of World War II, a change of attitude about adult education came to the colonial government who then introduced the Colonial Development and Welfare Act in 1940. This development was as a result of consciousness that the training of the adults could be helpful and essential to the national mobility (Adeyemo et al 2014).

The policy on adult education was however endorsed in 1951 by the Central Board of Education and the aim was to organise remedial primary education for adults, including basic adult literacy and craft making. The policy also stressed the importance of women's participation in adult education (Fafunwa, 1974). Following the policy, adult literacy classes sprung up in many parts of Nigeria with considerable enthusiasm

for adult literacy among the people and governments of the three regions of Nigeria; East, West and north.

However, Nnazor (2005) stresses that the enthusiasm was particularly strong from 1950 to 1956 but the free primary education schemes initiated in 1955 and 1957 resulted in the waning of the enthusiasm and in drastic decline in government support for adult literacy. The enormous cost of free primary education left little for adult literacy and as a result the first somewhat serious attempt at adult education lost steam or even collapsed. The Ashby Commission was also silent on adult education though it flickered in some communities unattended to by the Federal government but barely kept alive by regional government and voluntary agencies.

With the attainment of independence in 1960, Nigeria became challenged with having to evolve its own political ideology coupled with the problem of economic independence and education was seen as instrument through which these problems could be tackled (Adesanya, 2005). Nigeria attained independence in 1960 but was only able to convene the National Curriculum Conference in 1973. The report of the conference led to the adoption of the National Policy on Education in 1977 which was reviewed in 1981, 1998, 2004 and 2013. The paramount importance attached to education in Nigeria was clearly spelt out when the policy document described education as an instrument *par excellence* for effecting national development. The policy provides for equal access to education including continuing and further education, and commits to the eradication of illiteracy and promotion of life-long learning through the provision of mass literacy, adult and non-formal education.

To achieve the above mentioned goals, the Federal government established a National Commission for Mass, Adult and Non-formal Education. And to complement the efforts of the Federal government, each state established a Mass Literacy Agency as part of the overall national efforts to eradicate mass illiteracy in Nigeria.

The famous 1990 Jomtein World Conference on Education for All recommended that basic education should not be considered as a static term, but as a process to be determined by every nation according to its evolutionary development needs. The declaration and Framework for Action emanating from the conference did not define basic education

in terms of years of schooling, but as a close articulation of the formal, non-formal and informal approaches to the mechanisms for awakening an all-round development of the human potential. Thus, in 1992, the scope of basic education in Nigeria was expanded to include pre-primary, primary, the first three years of secondary education (that is junior secondary school), mass literacy for adolescents, adults and women's education (Osokoya, 2008).

President Olusegun Obasanjo formally launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme on September, 1999 in fulfilment of the Federal government dream to provide UBE in Nigeria. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004), basic education shall be free and compulsory, and shall also include adult and non-formal education programmes at primary, and junior secondary education level for adults and out of school youths. Adeyemi, Oribabor and Adeyemi (2012) note that the UBE involves a variety of formal and non-formal educational activities, and is a foundation for acquisition of further knowledge, skills and competencies in diverse fields.

Adult Education in Contemporary Nigeria

Adult education is expected to address the socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental problems besieging humanity in their various societies. This is so because adults are the major occupants of the production sectors of the economy (Onyenemezu, 2012). According to FRN (2004), mass literacy, adult and non-formal education shall encourage all forms of functional education given to youths and adults outside the formal school system, such as functional literacy, remedial and vocational education. FRN (2004) further gives the goals of mass literacy, adult and non-formal education to be:

- (i) Provision of functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who never had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education. For example nomads, migrant families, the disable, etc.
- (ii) Provision of functional and remedial education for those young people who did not complete secondary education.
- (iii) Provision of education for different categories of completers

of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills.

- (iv) Provision of in-service, on-the-job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills, and
- (v) Giving the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

The operation of adult education has been largely dependent on need and political considerations. The latter factor has played a prominent role because of political instability in Nigeria and the concomitant emphasis of the various incumbent governments (Adeyemo et al, 2014). The various forms of adult education in Nigeria include literacy education, liberal education, continuing education, health and environmental education, non-formal education, agricultural and industrial education, cooperative education, traditional education, life-long education, women education, entrepreneurship education, peace education, etc.

According to Nzeneri (2005) adult and non-formal education provides adults opportunities to continue their education at any level and in various forms in response to their individual level needs and that of society. These needs of man may require achieving new knowledge and skills for handling his life challenges and the constant changes in technology. The changing world of work also demands regular update, upgrade and acquisition of new skills and knowledge of Nigerians, especially the adults to function effectively within the society. Education enhances personal, social, political and economic development among others and, the lack of it is a limiting factor for anyone to function in modern contemporary society. As such every Nigeria needs basic education which can be referred to as basic literacy skills, numeracy skills and general social knowledge to function effectively as an individual who is able to contribute meaningfully to the development of the society and nation in general.

Challenges Facing Adult Education Practices in Nigeria and the Way Forward

Adult education has been and is still faced by challenges in terms of

policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. For example, some Nigerians are of the erroneous impression that adult education has to do with only literacy education, whereas literacy education is only one out of many forms of adult education programmes in Nigeria.

Some of the challenges facing adult education practices in the country include:

- (i) Lack of political will on the part of government – past and present government of Nigeria have not properly funded this aspect of education but merely pay lip services. Oyediji (2016) observes that Nigerian government has continued to state its commitment to the education sector, a comparative analysis with budgetary allocations by other countries even in Africa indicated that the Nigerian government has never put its money where its mouth is.
- (ii) Problem of personnel growth and development – the practitioners in the adult and non-formal education sector are looked upon as nobodies in the society and as such the young and indeed the adult do not wish to be associated with them. It is very difficult to persuade people to take to certain vocations because they are not satisfied with the status of existing practitioners in the field. Not much in terms of number is recorded for people wishing to learn these trades that are freely given in the adult and non-formal education. There is therefore dearth of personnel as nobody is willing to be recruited into poverty knowingly (Ezele and Tedjere, 2005).
- (iii) Poor funding – this has to do lack or inadequate money or other forms of support set aside for the implementation and delivery of adult education programmes. Adequate funding is crucial to the success of any human endeavour, adult education inclusive. The funding of adult education depends largely on the nature of the programme, the sponsoring organisation and the goal that it is designed to achieve. Sources of funding adult education in Nigeria include federal, state and local government budgetary allocations, contributions of parastatal institutions and voluntary agencies.

Low status is accorded adult education in Nigeria relative to the formal education system and this is reflected in the organisation, funding, and attention to adult education. For example, Abdallah (2016) observes that federal and states governments of Nigeria was to spend 8.44 percent of their total budget of 12.2 trillion on education in 2016, the figure which is far below the 26 percent benchmark set by UNESCO on education for developing countries. Also, Oyediji (2016) noted that in the 2017 budget proposal presented by President Buhari, 448.01 billion was allocated to education, representing about 6 percent of the 7.30 trillion budget contrary to the budgetary benchmark recommendation by UNESCO to enable nations adequately cater for rising education demands. The budgetary allocation according to Oyediji (2016) remains the lowest since 2011 in terms of amount.

According to Osuji in Abdallah (2016), the poor spending on education means Nigeria will have more adult illiterates, poor education quality, low GDP growth and poor achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 which Nigeria is a signatory. This according to Musa in Abdallah (2016) shows clearly that the country has not yet recognised education as a veritable key to development and economic empowerment. However, the little and inadequate budgetary allocations of the government on education place more importance to the primary, secondary and tertiary education at the detriment of adult education. The status of adult education should compare favourably with formal education if the various governments (federal, state and local) identify the veritable potentials in adult education and make necessary commitment in terms of funding and recognition. Only through provision of quality adult education can the population drive itself out of poverty, terrorism, and match towards economic empowerment, growth and development.

- (iv) Scope of adult education – adult education embraces all organised educational processes that are outside the formal school system. This is in line with the Nairobi (UNESCO)

conference of 1976 which implies that adult education should include all organised educational processes that are outside the formal school system. FRN (2004) stated that adult education consists of functional literacy, continuing, vocational, aesthetic, cultural and civic education for youths and adults outside the formal school system. However, Adeyemo et al (2014) submit that in practice, most of the programmes do not quite exist, and where they do, they are not properly executed in the respective Ministries and Departments concerned. As such, adult education is erroneously seen as being mainly concerned with literacy education, continuing education and remedial education without necessarily addressing aesthetic, cultural and civic education, non-formal education, etc.

- (v) Over-centralisation of adult education – Adeyemo et al (2014) note that adult education is better planned and organised at the local government level to make the programme culturally responsive and problem oriented. The present system of centrally imposed curriculum, organisation, and methodology is not relevant for solving local community problems. Every local government/ local education authority department should take the responsibility for identifying, planning, publicising, funding and motivating the people among others for the various adult education programmes in the different localities.
- (vi) Poor feedback resulting from poor monitoring and evaluation – the problem of lack or poor feedback from programme executors to their sponsors, stating the extent of progress achieved in the implemented projects, challenges faced, and the way forward is a major challenge of adult education practices in Nigeria. There should be close interaction and exchange of adequate information among the executors, sponsors and adult education movement for quality adult education delivery.
- (vii) Poor record keeping – this is a challenge facing the practice of adult education in Nigeria thereby having serious negative

impact on the conduct and findings of research studies. This seriously affects the database needed for adequate planning and implementation of adult education intervention programmes.

- (viii) Dearth of quality research in adult education – research is germane to the development of any system. This is inadequate partly due to poor funding, low recognition accorded adult education, poor conditions of service of adult educators, problem of information dissemination in Nigeria, etc. there is the need for increased funding, improved recognition, improved and better condition of service of adult educators and the expansion of mass media facilities especially to rural areas.
- (ix) Inequalities of opportunities to adult education – Adeyemo et al (2004) observe obvious unequal access to adult education in Nigeria, some of which reside in the constraints of poverty, location, poor orientation, time and interests. The way out is for a wide diversification of adult education opportunities to allow for varying categories of adults to benefit from the different programmes. Employers should also intensify staff development programme for staff of varying categories.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The education of its population irrespective of the age, sex, status and so on, is the major goal of every country for improved productivity of its people, and Nigeria is no exception. This is because of the realisation that return of investment in education is often greater than the return on investment in other capital goods. It has however been discovered that despite the laudable programmes of the federal government of Nigeria such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Universal Basic Education (UBE), among others, the country is yet to adequately tap maximally the potentials of the adult population through adult education, for the much-needed breakthrough in our developmental quest. Adult Education promotes an increased knowledge and skills thereby encouraging positive and active engagement of people in their own development and that of the larger society.

From the above conclusion the following are hereby recommended:

- (1) There should be proper mobilisation of all stakeholders to come and embrace adult education programmes so as to achieve the desired results.
- (2) Proper recognition and funding should be accorded adult and non-formal education as is the case with other sectors / level of education. This is because the adults in the society are the major contributors more than children, to the development any nation.
- (3) The universal basic education programme of the federal government should be implemented to the latter as this will bring about the expected improved and better adult and non-formal education practices in Nigeria.
- (4) The Federal Ministry of Education, NMEC and other stakeholders in adult education should properly monitor the various state agencies for mass education to ensure not only the provision of adult education but also the level of compliance with the provision of the UBE act in terms of funding, etc.
- (5) Quality researches in the field of adult education should be encouraged and funded by all stakeholders for the advancement in the theory and practice of adult education.
- (6) Upward review of the remuneration and other conditions of service of adult educators/facilitators should be increased for more dedication on their part. There should be regular training and re-training of adult educators/facilitators/practitioners.

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