

Agenda for new directions for the implementation of adult education programmes in a developing milieu

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Abstract

Setting new directions for recognition and the implementation of adult education programmes in the 21st century has become imperative. This is particularly so in a developing milieu such as Nigeria. A look at the national objectives of adult education contained in the National Policy on Education reveals a gap between the gamut of programmes of adult education and the focus of government interest. This can be traced to the vestiges and vintage of colonial lopsided policy on adult education. The implications of this colonial legacy for over-all development and the need for a new agenda is the focus of this paper.

Keywords: adult education, agenda for new directions, developing milieu

Introduction

The Genesis

A meaningful documentation of the implementation of adult education programmes in Nigeria cannot be made without reference to the colonial efforts in adult education. It goes without saying that colonial government efforts in adult education after the Second World War (1939 - 1945) sowed the seeds that propagated literacy campaigns in Nigeria. Characteristic of the early post-war period were literacy campaigns and the use of mass education teams moving from place to place to sensitize the masses.

One of the major defects associated with earliest activities in adult education was that apart from the literacy component, other programmes of adult education were not given attention by the colonial government as it considered literacy education as a remedial primary education for adults especially in rural areas (Ezimah, 2009) ^[1]. The roadmap for the implementation of adult education programmes in Nigeria has become imperative in the light of narrow adult education offered to the teeming population of Nigerian adults in need of versatile and functional education, inadequate mobilization of resources (human and material), faulty implementation strategies, limited clientele and time frame - all of which have been nondescript and equivocal to say the least during the colonial period.

Adult education from colonial period has suffered an eclipse because of inadequate budgetary allocation. Consequently, as an appendage to the formal sector of education, payments made to adult education has been on ex gratia basis. As a former British colony, the British government has no clearly defined policy on education for Nigeria. Fafunwa (1974) ^[2] reports that education activities in the colony were managed by colonial administrators, in collaboration with Christian missions and their home offices. Nigeria was part of the enquiry when in 1922, a Commission was set up by the Phelps-Stokes Fund to review education in West Africa and Equatorial Africa which produced a report entitled: Education in Africa

The Commission stressed in its recommendation the need for the development and the institution of a policy on adult

education and the education of the entire community if education was to have a meaningful impact on development. As a result of the report of the Phelps-Stokes Commission, the British colonial government issued the first education policy for Nigeria in 1925, which only emphasized school education for children at the expense of a large population of illiterate adults. Thus the launching pad for the institutionalization and implementation of robust programmes in adult education for the teeming population of youth and adults was greatly jeopardized.

As a continuing effort to the development of adult education in Nigeria by the colonial government, the Central Board of Education endorsed in 1951 a policy on adult education which was to organize remedial primary education for adults – a policy that flourished adult literacy classes in many parts of Nigeria (Nnazor, 2005) ^[5]. In 1959, the Ashby Commission was appointed to determine Nigeria's need for human resources and post-secondary education for the next twenty years – 1960-1980. Reviewing the progress made so far in primary, secondary and post-secondary education, the Commission noted that significant progress had been made at these levels. Again, there was a conscious omission of adult education in the report (Nnazor, 2005) ^[5]. This marked the genesis of misplaced priorities in the development and implementation of adult education programmes in Nigeria.

According to Fasokun (2000) ^[3] as cited in Obasi (2014) ^[6], most developing countries of the world inherited a negative attitude towards adult education from former colonial powers. This view by Obasi (2004:27) ^[6] on the prevailing status of adult education in developing countries is noteworthy:

The status accorded adult and non-formal education then was as a result of the prevailing circumstances of focusing attention on the formal system of education. Consequently, in Nigeria for example, the field suffered neglect and largely remained under-explored, and its products were under-utilized for national development. However, in the post-independent period, its relevance was recognized mainly for literacy purposes. This narrow conception of the field unduly influenced official thinking towards supporting only

adult literacy programmes to the detriment of other important aspects of the discipline. It is not suppressing therefore that...the popularity of adult education in Africa started eroding in the early 80's concomitantly with the -rise of basic education: Indeed, how right was he! From the above premise therefore, Obasi (2004) ^[6] infers that adult education is yet to be fully appreciated as a discipline relevant for socio-economic development of Nigeria given the level of its development at the tertiary level of educational institutions. Similarly, the training programmes offered in the universities led to lack of understanding on the actual scope of the discipline and its role in national development. Thus the discipline has witnessed the influx of lecturers from other disciplines. This influx of lecturers with no bias in adult education has led to gross abuse and limited scope of the discipline. This has created the need for new agenda for adult education in Nigeria.

The Era of Misplaced Optimism

The post-independent era marks a faulty beginning in the setting of objectives and promotion of programmes of adult education in Nigeria. It was a period heralded by misconception and abuse in programme selection, content and recruitment of personnel. Priority was not only misplaced, but resources wasted and misused by the implemented.

The attention given to adult education in the post-independent era seem to gain new momentum especially in the early 1980's following the launching of national literacy campaign in 1982 by the ShehuShagari administration. The different spate of literacy campaigns launched in Nigeria Between 1982-92 and 1991-2000 respectively can best be described as prevarications. They were lackluster and no sooner had they been launched than they waned. These campaigns had been spasmodic and lacking in vigour.

However, it must be admitted that Nigeria made modest achievements during this period in conceptualizing and designing some functional adult education programmes but were soon jettisoned by successive governments. Some of these laudable programmes deserve mention here. They include: Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI); National Directorate of Employment (NDE); Agricultural Development Programme (ADP); National Orientation Agency (NOA) and Better Life/Family Support Programme (Ezimah, 2009) ^[1].

Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)

The Directorate was primarily established to promote the rural development drive of the Federal Government. It was involved in the provision of technical and expert advise for community development through agricultural extension service to farmers, opening up of access roads for transportation of persons, goods and services, and in the construction of social amenities aimed at enhancing the living conditions of community dwellers.

National Directorate of Employment (NDE)

This is a government agency designed to provide vocational training in differentiated educational activities such as electronics, mechanic, building, hair dressing etc. It is a non- formal type of education expressed as basic education necessary for survival in the society, and which offered self-employment to the recipients.

Agricultural Development Programme (ADP)

The ADP is a government established agency designed to sensitize all categories of agricultural farmers on the modern methods of farming techniques in order to improve food production in sufficient quantity and quality, and increase the income of the small holder farmers for the improvement of the standard of living of the rural population.

National Orientation Agency (NOA)

The establishment of the National Orientation Agency (NOA) shows the importance which government attaches to information dissemination and an enlightened populace. The agency is concerned with civic and political education of adult citizens, and to sensitize them on the programmes of government. The basis of democratic living is that all people should participate in the life of the nation and community. In a fast changing world, where the traditional patterns of government are giving way to new ones people have to learn their responsibilities and privileges in a changing environment. The complexities of modern living requires explanation and understanding; failure to do this may result in frustration and resentment, especially where people feel that they are not being carried along, and that their rights have been infringed upon without their knowledge and prior approval. Also, people must be reoriented against wrong values in the society.

Better Life/Family Support Programme

This is concerned with the reintegration of women into the social and economic life of their communities and the nation. The brainchild of two former wives of Heads of State, it was conceived to equip women with useful skills that will put them in the mainstream of political and economic development in Nigeria. Guidance in improvement of family life is provided for women.

Paradoxically in Nigeria, governments come and go; and this applies to much of their development programmes such as these. Beyond the out-of-school programmes highlighted above, there was no deliberate effort by government to enunciate formal adult education programmes that will impart knowledge and skills to the youth and adult men and women in a school framework. This has to a significant extent affected the literacy rate and capacity building of Nigerians needed to stimulate sustained growth. It has also put Nigeria behind other nations which have caught up with development indexes used to measure progressive economies. This is the necessity for agenda for new directions for adult education in Nigeria.

New Paradigms and the Need for Paradigm Shift

There can be no better time than now for charting a new and comprehensive policy on adult education for Nigeria. This is because the world is experiencing a new political and economic order. It is a time when every progressive government is striving to achieve the millennium development goals agenda. To do this for Nigeria, changing the old mentality and attitude will be a precondition. Again, it will require dismantling old traditional school structure to accommodate an all-embracing new structure whose selection will be based on 'positive discrimination'.

This new structure that will be built on the 'principle of positive discrimination' will have more claimants for education predetermined by aptitudes and not just by conventional pattern of grading as is presently the case.

There will be wide-ranging and differentiated academic, professional, technical and vocational programmes and choices open to recipients of education with a more result oriented outcomes. This will be a relieve from the current state of unemployment, under-employment and under-development that have been blamed on the current formal education system widely criticized for its narrowness, exclusiveness and dysfunctionality.

There is an evolving international trend to adopting an inclusive approach to education in which the youth and adults are provided for. This has called for educational reforms in response to the demands of globalization. This requires that countries particularly in developing countries adopt international Conventions that reflect those reforms and strategies that are in tune with local realities. The advocacy for new paradigms is in the light of educational approach that ensures equalitarianism and opportunity for all learners as embedded within the principles of human rights (Forlin, 2012).

A human rights-based approach to education for all will therefore be predicated on international law that recognizes 'full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and to enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society' (UNESCO, 2018). These aims (and the other aims of education under international law) according to UNESCO, cannot be met through education delivered exclusively to children. The right to education, therefore, recognizes the importance of education as a lifelong process. The early years are considered foundational for lifelong learning, where each level of education lays the building blocks for further education throughout a person's life.

In the recommendation of UNESCO (2015), adult education and learning is an integral part of the right to education and life-long learning, and comprises:

all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes, formal, non- formal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live, develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities, organizations and societies.

It has been recognized that adults may re-entre or entre education for a number of reasons, including to

- replace missed or neglected primary and/or secondary education;
- develop basic education skills, such as literacy and numeracy;
- develop new vocational skills and expertise to adapt to changing labour conditions or to change career, or for continued professional development;
- continue learning for personal development and leisure; and
- Participate fully in social life and in democratic processes.

In addition to the dividends accruing from adult education highlighted above, benefits of adult education to the individual include

- enabling the enjoyment of other human rights, for instance, the rights to work, health, and to take part in cultural life and in the conduct of public affairs;

empowering economically and socially marginalized adults to understanding, question and transform, through critical awareness, the sources of their marginalization, including lifting themselves out of poverty;

- building the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in society;
- Facilitating active citizenship.

It is equally established that adult education has wider economic, social, political and cultural benefits, most notably recognized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) which have numerous target on adult education, and to which all states have committed. Regrettably, in spite of states' commitments to adult education, progress to implement and realize the right to education for adolescents, young people, and adults have been slow. This failure to fully implement adult education compounds historical marginalization because those most likely to benefit from adult education are those who did not receive primary and/or secondary education at childhood.

UNESCO (2016) reports that at present, adult education, particularly non-formal education, is generally the most under-funded level of education with few countries spending the recommended three percent of their national education budget on adult literacy and education

Programmes. Consequently, adult education and learning is not generally provided for free the cost of which must be borne by the individual, which acts as a prohibitive barrier in accessing adult education or is a financial burden on already marginalized adults who have to pay to access an education that was previously denied to them.

A fundamental element of the right to education is that it is accessible to all which is why primary and lower secondary education is generally provided for free by most states. The principle applies to adult education and learning. This is however different for adults in that in addition to the state, there are market providers: companies train and develop their staff, community organizations create learning opportunities for their members, and the web offers a range of free and charged-for learning programmes. A key responsibility of states is to establish a legal and regulatory framework that secures access to adult education and learning opportunities particularly for those from marginalized groups. Also, states have obligation under international human rights law in relation to certain forms of adult education and learning. This is the task before Nigeria and other defaulting States on whom the guilty verdict had been passed for non-full implementation of adult education programmes.

Agenda for New Directions: A Proposal

As a developing nation, Nigeria's social, economic, political and cultural development is hinged on adult education. In all its ramifications, adult education has been seen as a prerequisite for the development of prosperity and guaranteeing of social and economic security for all people. Current practice in developing nations has been to promote literacy education to the neglect of a myriad of other programmes. Nnzaor (2005) recommends comprehensiveness of offerings in the provision of adult education. In his view, if the talents, skills and knowledge of the adults are to be developed, mobilized and optimally utilized in nation building, comprehensive education and

training must be provided for the adults. This view is underpinned by the fact that adults constitute the work force in the population. In the light of the foregoing discourse, a number of themes are here proposed as agenda for new directions for Nigeria. These themes are by no means exhaustive.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is founded in the integration of leaning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages (children, young people, adults and elderly, whether girls or boys, women or men), in all life-wide contexts (family, school, community, work place and so on) and through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal) that together meet a wide range of learning needs and demands.

Community Development Education

This is widely regarded as the oldest form of adult education programme. This form of education has been as long as man has existed, with every society developing its own modus operandi. Community development is a form of civic education. This is a process whereby members of a community are encouraged to identify their problems and to find solutions to solve them. The emphasis is on self-reliance. Community development education can be designed to capture such themes as agriculture, health, domestic science, rural industries, housing, cooperative, public amenities and recreation.

Health and Family Life Education

The recurrent themes of personal and environmental hygiene are increasingly becoming areas of focus in health and family life education. A programme designed for health and family life education must of necessity provide for sustained publicity or enlightenment outfit which will cut across towns and villages, religious organizations, age grades, mass media and other social and non-governmental organizations.

Vocational/entrepreneurship education

This programme is primarily designed to include skills and knowledge acquisition, professional and technical training and in-service training and training on-the-job. This could be commercial, technical or professional in content and for the updating of knowledge thereby averting knowledge obsolescence occasioned by knowledge explosion in the changing world. It could also be used to develop or implement innovative social or business plans.

Civic and peace/political education

This is a type of education given to people to enable them have the chance of understanding society, their country, its people and the entire world in which they live and to enable them experience the satisfaction derived from self-fulfilment. Education is a vehicle of promoting peace, and to that extent tolerance in people open to other cultures, able to appreciate the value of freedom and respect for human dignity and difference which are necessary to prevent conflicts or resolve them by non-conflict means.

Agricultural extension education

Agricultural extension education is designed to teach people the benefits of cooperative activities, new farming methods, for improving agriculture as a revenue earner as well as

provide adequate food for the teeming population.

Functional literacy education

Functional literacy means an attempt to combine reading, writing and numeracy with a programme of education in basic vocational skills directly linked to the occupational needs of the clientele. Functional literacy far from rudimentary literacy is aimed at helping illiterate members of the society acquire such skills as will help them respond favourably to changing realities of the environment. A design for a functional literacy programme demands a thorough classification or grouping of the various occupations and the needs of the learners.

Environmental adult education

Environmental adult education has become a recurrent theme in world development agenda. This is because adults as the main users of the environment require the skills, awareness, knowledge in order to participate in the management and protection of the environment. This should be a major concern of the government of the day in view of the increasing environmental decay being witnessed on a daily basis.

Conclusions

Providing an all-inclusive education that caters for the learning needs of all and sundry is an essential lubricant for over-all development. It goes without saying, therefore, that a nation that has not made adult education an integral part of its education system will suffer social and economic miasma. Development is the process through which individual and organizational growth can through time achieve its fullest potential. Development reflects the cultural levels of a society - socially, politically and economically. Adult education is seen here as an important instrument in enhancing development process regarded not only as a means of increasing the resources available to society, but also as a way of assuring their more equitable distribution among people, organizations and communities. Adult education provided for all will enhance and sustain the inculcation of mental and physical nimbleness and of knowledge of working men and women.

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