

NEW PERSPECTIVES IN ADULT EDUCATION IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Adult education encompasses diverse educational programmes to accommodate the diverse interest of the diverse clientele. The need-meeting nature of the programmes demands that adult education enterprise should be viewed from different perspectives. In this paper a framework sketching out programmes and offering agencies of adult education has been presented. The programs include: literacy, continuing education, extension education, women education, family education, business /commercial/technical/industrial education, forces and prison staff education, prisoners' education, education for the handicapped, nomadic education and public enlightenment.

Keywords: Literacy, Adult, Education, Vocational, continuing

INTRODUCTION

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. Therefore, it is very beneficial to focus on different perspectives not minding their organizational bases. In this paper, we shall first, attempt a definition of “adult education”. Secondly, we shall highlight some trends in adult education in Nigeria. Next we shall sketch out an action framework outlining programmes and offering agencies.

Adult Education Defined

In the 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 organized 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. But assuming that the definition is for “adult education”, Osuji (1984:2-5) dismisses it as definition by instantiation (listing out constituent parts), which does not give the actual meaning of a concept.

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 thread 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). But while variabilities 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.

Trends

Adult Education in the western sense started in Nigeria as a result of evangelical activities of the Muslim and the Christian religious missionaries. Islam was brought into Nigeria in the fourteenth century. As the language of the Qur’an is Arabic, the missionaries embarked on the teaching of the language so as to bring the ‘infidels’ to the way of Allah via literacy. Thus, the teaching of Qur’an became inseparably bound with the teaching of Arabic. This is the reason why elementary Arabic Schools in Nigeria were called Qur’anic schools (Trimingham, 1959:159). Memorisation of verses of the Qur’an, inclusion of Islamic religious values into the adherents and the teaching of the Islamic laws and custom constituted the main purpose of the education.

On setting foot into Nigeria as from 1842, the Christian missionaries embarked on literacy education in order to facilitate their evangelical efforts by helping the converts read the Bible, Prayer Books and other religious pamphlets. Concerted efforts were made through Sunday School, class meetings and prayer meetings towards literacy. Read (1952:63) testifies that the converts were made literate before being fully admitted into the church. The zeal of the missionaries over literacy could be better seen in their efforts to put the local Nigerian languages into writing and translating the bible, prayer books and other pamphlets into the local languages. In addition to adult literacy efforts, the missionaries established training homes for women. In these homes, Literacy, Home Economics, Health Education Child-care and Home management included the subjects taught. The need to enable the women converts make good homes drove the missionaries to embark on these programmes. By 1934 such home-craft classes, vocational classes and marriage training homes had been established in some parts of Southern Nigeria. Further-more, vocational education programmes were established for men (Omolewa, 1975:5). Thus, the adult education efforts of the missionaries were triggered off and sustained by evangelical zeal towards religious, social and economic progress of their converts.

The British Colonial Government belatedly realized the need for literacy for social and economic development in its colonies by the publication of the Mass Education in African Society in 1944. Thus, in 1946 mass education campaign was launched in Nigeria. The literacy component of this campaign was aimed at enabling adults acquire basic literacy for effective participation in social, political and economic progress of their communities.

The realization of the need for mass literacy led to the declaration in the current NPE that “an intensive nation-wide mass literacy campaign will be launched as a matter of priority”. As a matter of fact, since the seventies mass literacy campaigns have been launched, yet mass illiteracy still persists in the country. Just on September 30, 1999, President launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE), which extends from the primary schools to junior secondary school and adult literacy programme. The UBE is said to be compulsory, free and universal (Nigerian Tribune, October 1, 1999).

It is unfortunate that some concrete steps taken towards eradication of illiteracy in the country seem not to have yielded fruits hence literacy rate still remains at 66.8% (UNDP, 2004). Some of these steps included, establishment of: Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) in 1971; State Agencies for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (as from 1980); National Adult Education Centre, Kano; Nomadic Education Commission; (1989) and, National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) in 1991.

The National Commission, charged with the responsibility of making young and adult illiterates be literate before the year 2000 A.D., adopted the policy of Each-One-Teach-One-Or-Fund-The-Teaching-Of-One. Unfortunately, this policy does not smack of commitment and seriousness on the part of the government as it is based on the principle of volunteerism. Worse still, the policy is based on the faulty assumption that every educated Nigerian should pay back to his/her illiterate relation or neighbour money spent on his/her education through rendering such services. Osuji (1984:8-9) has criticized the idea of expecting:

Educated Nigerian adults... to participate in the national service as teacher in Adult Education Programmes... as far as they feel able, to render the service free to the nation (NPE, 1981).

Literacy, as well as any other programme of education, should be seen as a costly programme successful execution of which would be very rewarding. Therefore, the government should be ready to back up the war against illiteracy in Nigeria with political will and adequate budgetary provisions. However, we are in the 21st century yet illiteracy is writ large every-where in the country. More and concerted campaigns should be launched.

As a result of the British colonial government’s indifference over higher education in Nigeria resulting in the absence of institutions, higher adult education in the country started out of individual initiatives. By 1930 some Nigerians had passed London Matriculation and degree examinations through correspondence courses. Sequel to the publication of the Asquith and the Elliot Commissions reports in 1945, the Oxford Extra-Mural Delegation started extra-mural classes in selected towns in 1947. These classes were taken over in 1949 by the University College, Ibadan, which was established in 1948. But the courses were liberal and non-examination-oriented and did not accord with the aspirations of the students. However, the University of Ibadan and the emergent universities as from the sixties, offered examination-oriented extra-mural courses that were congruent with the aspirations of the students. Distance education programmes are now being offered by many tertiary institutions in the country towards preparing students for examinations and other purposes.

The Industrial Training Fund established in 1971 deserves a special mention. This is an extra-ministerial establishment for continuing education purposes. Having been established to promote and encourage skills acquisition in industries and commerce to meet the needs of the economy, this Fund has recorded a catalogue of successes. Thus, in the country, tertiary institutions, different government ministries and agencies and non-governmental agencies provide continuing education opportunities by offering need-meeting programmes. However, distance education institutions in the country should, in addition to examination-oriented programmes, offer liberal education programmes for the interest of people who desire them. It is gratifying to add that the aborted National Open University (NOU) has been reopened.

Framework for the 21st Century

As we have seen above, adult education is very broad that it requires all hands to be on deck for effective execution in all its ramifications. The formal education, which is enlist, is for specific period of life. But adult education focuses on the whole lifespan and is non-discriminatory. Therefore, it is very necessary to view adult education from different facets and perspectives. Some perspectives to be presented may not be new but there is need for them to be presented anew because of their significance in the twenty-first century. The Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) in 1973 presented a proposal for inclusion in the Third National Development Plan. This framework for the 21st millennium is adapted from the NNCAE former proposal.

Functional Literacy

We talk of functional variant of literacy because of the need to relate the content to the cultural, social and economic needs and interests of adults, and in order to motivate the adults. The previous campaigns against illiteracy did not yield the desired result of obliterating illiteracy in the country. The adult literacy component of the recently launched UBE should constitute a new vision to launch a fresh offensive for the 21st century. However, the new conception for adult literacy should not be limited to initial skill of reading and writing. It should include post-literacy programmes so that the neo-literates will not relapse. Therefore, primers and follow-up reading materials should be provided. This necessitates establishment of public libraries and local newspapers to sustain the literacy skills.

For effective functional literacy, the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education; the Stage Agencies for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education; and, Nomadic Education Commission should assume leading roles. Other relevant ministries, which include Agriculture, Health, Social Development and Culture, Community Development, Women Affairs and Industries, should enlist their co-operation. Police Affairs, the Prison and the Military, the National Directorate of Employment and non-governmental voluntary agencies, should enlist their support. The National Youth Services Corps should be made to include literacy campaign as an aspect of the Community Development assignment, while the orientation

programmes should include methodology of adult education. The religious bodies in the past played a very conspicuous role in adult literacy and some are still playing this noble role. They should be encouraged to double their efforts with moral and financial support from the government. The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) is required to play much role in literacy education in the country. Also local government and communities should take charge in their areas.

Continuing Education

The need for learning throughout life underlies the concept of continuing education. This concept refers to programmes of education following cessation of formal education at a level after primary education. The programme could be in the area of intellectual, vocational or liberal education. In the educational continuum, it is ideal that when a person drops out of the formal system, the one should have opportunity to drop into appropriate level of the non-formal to continue his/her education. Continuing education programmes are couched in different terms, such as, evening classes, extra-mural (for tertiary institutions) and extension classes. As a matter of fact, tertiary institutions extend their services to the public outside their walls through extra-mural classes. This could be done through different methodologies, which include, face-to-face, and print and electronic media. It is worthy of note that the aborted National Open University has now reopened to render its services to different categories of Nigerians. The tertiary institutions should double up their efforts towards continuing education. Professional Associations, Trade Unions and the Industrial Training Fund, should work harder to make much more impact. Furthermore, the tertiary institutions should accommodate examination-oriented and liberal programmes so as to take care of all interests. The important roles played by private efforts should be acknowledged and encouraged.

Extension Education

Here, one is thinking of tertiary institutions or ministries extending their research findings to the public. For instance, a lot of researches are done in the Faculties of Agriculture and in the Agricultural Research Institutes. The findings, such as, improved varieties of crops, new cultivation techniques and improved animal species are sent to the farmers. Hence the relevance of extension departments. Also, in Health, the extension sections reach out and meet the needs of the public in the communities. Such services could come up in terms of inoculation, public lectures, campaigns against some diseases, such as AIDS, cholera and ringworm. Relevant ministries, institutions and agencies are very much called upon to take care of the extension education relating to their fields. Professional associations, such as Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Nigerian Pharmaceutical Association (NPA) and relevant agencies are called upon for services in this area.

Women Education

As a result of the unique position of women in the society, special education programmes are designed for them in order to enable them discharge their functions creditably as mothers and wives, in technical, professional and in commercial areas. The programmes, such as, Better Life For Rural Women, Family Support Programme, Family Economic Advancement Programme and, Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) should not be seen as belonging to a particular regime. Rather, the Women Affairs Ministry should use such to fashion out enduring programmes of education that could accommodate the interests of women in the

country. Other agencies such as Health, Agriculture, Trade and Industry and Religious and non-governmental agencies should embrace women education programmes. In these days of gender sensitivities in the country, studies should be carried out on women education programmes and interests by relevant organizations.

Family Education

Educated families make a healthy nation. Therefore, there is great need to incorporate family education into adult education so as to enable husbands and wives and relations get new knowledge in family management. Components of family education should include, planning, budgeting, family responsibilities, family planning and rationalization of production of children, children and adolescence psychology. The Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Women Affairs, Social Development and Community Development, Tertiary Institution, the Nigerian Union of Teachers, Nigerian Medical Association, Voluntary Agencies and Religious bodies have much responsibility towards success in this area.

Business/Commercial/Technical/Industrial Education

Traditionally, vocational education is done mainly through apprenticeship system. That is, the system whereby a learner (apprentice) is attached to a master-craftsman for the purpose of undergoing training for acquisition of skills. Opportunities for acquisition of new skills and improvement on working skills should be afforded to people in business, commerce and industries. The Ministries of Education, Industry, Trades, Science and Technology and Labour, Tertiary Institutions; Establishments, such as, Industrial Training Fund; Trade Unions, Vocational Improvement Centres, Professional Associations and other relevant agencies should be expected to prove their mettle in this programme.

Forces and Prison Staff Education

The Armed Forces (the army and the police) and the prison staff constitute a special workforce. Apart from their specialized education/training for their specialized services, they need education for integrating them into the society. Even within their specialized fields, they still need more and continuous education to cope with their duties, hence there is army education corps. The Police and the Prison staff also need special education programmes to keep abreast of modern development and orientations. The Ministries of Defence, Internal Affairs and Education should join hands in the education of the service groups. The Army Education Corps, Police Service Commission and Prison Service counterparts should offer continuing education programmes for the personnel more so as the nature of their work may not allow them benefit from those outside their barracks.

Prisoners' Education

Prisoners are incarcerated as a corrective measure, therefore, there is need for different programmes of education for achievement of this objective. Already different correctional education programmes are being offered in the Nigerian prisons, such as, literacy, continuing and vocational. Also, citizenship, moral and liberal programmes are necessary for conscientizing the inmates towards responsible citizenship. The National Commission, the State Agencies, the NNCAE and other education associations, Prison services and associations, religious bodies, voluntary agencies and other relevant bodies should co-operate in providing education services to prison inmates.

Education for the Handicapped

The deformed, the blind, and the dumb/deaf should be provided for in the areas of literacy, continuing education and vocational training. These groups of unfortunate citizens should be taken care of so that they should not see themselves as being rejected thereby becoming dejected. They should be rehabilitated through special education centres under whichever name. The Special Education Division of the Ministries of Education, Social Welfare Agencies and Religious bodies should accommodate the education needs of people in these groups.

Nomadic Education

Nomadic Education Commission was established in the country in 1989 to take care of the nomads, whose pastoral life cannot allow benefit from any formal or non-formal education programme. As their pastoral occupation involves movement in search of pasture for their cattle, their education is contextualised within their nomadic life. The National Commission and the relevant State Agencies should provide programmes that are relevant to the needs of these nomads. These programmes should include literacy, public enlightenment, group discussion, market lectures, home visitations and specific radio programmes that will be relevant to their specific needs (Tahir, 1987:44). As a matter of fact, as a result of the non-sedentary nature of their occupation, the electronic media have to be used mainly.

Public Enlightenment

As a matter of fact, all programmes discussed above are for enlightenment of the people. But here one refers to general education offered through the radio and television (electronic media) and the newspapers and periodicals (print media). Through the print and the electronic media very large audiences are reached at a time. There should be need for special time-slots for purposeful educational programmes. Also, there is need for special television and radio channels for such programmes. Such programmes should be broadcast both in English language and in the local languages. In order to help people who cannot purchase the gadgets, local viewing centres should be established by the local government or communities. Furthermore, every state should establish at least a newspaper part of which should be written in simple English and in the local language(s). In addition, the newspapers should be supplied to the viewing centres, which should also contain a library. The local viewing centres will also serve the purpose of providing a place of recreation, relaxation and discussion for the people.

Conclusion

The broad nature of the clientele and their educational needs and interests demands that adult education should be seen from different perspectives. Hence there should be different programmes, such as, literacy, continuing education, extension education, women education, family education, business/commercial/technical/industrial education, forces and prison staff education, prisoners' education, education for the handicapped, nomadic education and public enlightenment. Different and relevant methodologies should be used to reach out to the clientele wherever they may be, and to satisfy their educational needs and interests.

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