

FUNCTIONAL ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION AS AN AGENT FOR DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Education is needed not only as social service but also as agent for development which is fundamental to social, personal, political and economic development because when there is access to education, there is an increase in social and political awareness and heightened aspirations, self assurance and self assertiveness. Because of the importance of education, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, stipulates that every child has the right to education at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. The main role of education in man's life is to expand the people's knowledge base thereby helping them to shape their destinies and move them towards desirable goals and better living. Based on this assumption, every Nigerian should have a measure of literacy education and one that shall make them functional in their entire endeavor in which economic benefits will accrue to them thereby making them to have an improved living standard. It is on these facts that everybody in the society should aspire to be literate especially the one that is functional. It is against this background that this paper examined the relevance of functional literacy education and development.

Keywords: Education, Functional literacy, Development, Challenges and Prospects

Education helps in the development of the individual and society and it is regarded as the key that unlocks the door to development of the individual and society at large, this is because education produces people who contribute immensely to the growth and development of society (Hamma' adama & Sa'idu, 2016).

Developed and developing countries recognize the fact that education is a pre-requisite for growth and development and so they try to provide quality education for their citizens. Studies of the more advanced countries notably the United States, Denmark and Japan during the period of their economic growth and development, suggest that there had been a very significant relationship between their economic growth and the quality of education provided to their citizens (Thompson, 1981). It is due to the importance of education in terms of development that, the United Nations (U.N) Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 stipulates that every child has the right to education at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Independent African nations on becoming aware of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the fact that large investment would pay off in economic terms, started increasing the intake of school pupils at the primary level of education (Antwi, 1992).

In the same vein, the Nigerian government mandated every parent to enroll their children or wards into formal school at least to get basic education of nine years as stated in the 1999 constitution. However the national policy on education 2013 mentioned the need for the provision of functional

basic education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education (FGN, 2013). Based on the fore going background the researchers intend to ascertain the importance of functional literacy education in development.

Functional Literacy

Literacy to a layman is just the act of reading, writing and being able to do simple arithmetic. This could be equated with the basic literacy which is the minimum but adequate ability to read and write and when mention is made of basic literacy, it also describes the programme designed to achieve such basic skills. It is, however, important to note that literacy goes beyond activities designed to teach adults to read and write simple sentences. This is because such restricted skills are of little utility (Titmus as cited in Ayodele & Adedokun, nd). The emphasis on literacy campaign now is functional literacy, which is focused on the achievement of a level of reading, writing and numeracy adequate for effective participation in the life of one's community or society for development.

Olaleye & Adeyemo (2012) stated that, functional literacy was conceived of as working or work oriented literacy, they further mentioned that the evolution of the concept over time still focuses on making the new literate person to house his/her skills in changing people's standard of living. However recent development and discoveries show that there is distinction between literacy that empowers and literacy that domesticates. They further stated that the functionality of a literacy undertaking is the extent to which it is able to empower the beneficiary. The term functional literacy is in contrast with functional illiteracy which is a term used to describe reading and writing skills that are inadequate to manage daily living and employment tasks that require reading skills beyond a basic level (www.wikipedia.org).

Therefore, functional literacy is the acquisition of basic literacy, skills and self consciousness for individual and societal development.

National Objectives

Nigeria has five main national objectives as provided by the Second National Development Plan.

The national objectives are the building of:

- a free and democratic society
- a just and egalitarian society
- a united strong and self-reliant nation
- a great and dynamic economy
- a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (FRN, 2013).

In order to achieve the above national objectives, the nation's constitution declared compulsory education in the country, Bellow are the constitutional provision:

Government shall as and when practicable provide:

- (a) free, compulsory and universal primary education
- (b) free secondary education
- (c) free university education, and
- (d) free adult literacy programs (FRN, 1999:18).

Therefore, the above declaration on education indicates that development cannot be achieved without sound education for all categories of the populace in the country.

In Nigeria, it seems to be that most of the Nigerian adults are still illiterate functionally. In line with this, functional literacy education is vital in making Nigerian adult functionally literate for

their development and that of the country at large due to its diversification in nature. Functional literacy is more than a set of skills; it includes the ability to use those skills to solve problems in daily life (Ayodele & Adedokun, nd). The 2009 Human Development Report used the percentage of people lacking functional literacy skills as one of the variables to calculate the Human Poverty Index. In order to realize the development that the country is yearning for years Illiteracy must be wiped off in Nigeria realizing that the persistence of illiteracy, which is a consequence of underdevelopment and also a major impediment to development, makes it impossible for millions of men and women to play an effective part in the shaping of their own destinies, therefore efforts must be made to wage a battle against poverty (UNESCO, 1983). The implication of this is that functional literacy is the answer to people's plight of shaping their own destinies. With functional literacy, people will have sufficient skills to function for their individual development as well as the development of their communities and Nigeria as a whole (Ayodele, 2011).

Government Efforts towards Achieving Functional Literacy Education in Nigeria

The Nigerian government is making giant efforts to eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria. To make this possible, the federal government established the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) in 1990. In view of this each state has the Agency for Adult and Non-Formal Education (AANFE). The role of this, agency is to eradicate illiteracy within their areas of jurisdiction by providing literacy programmes that are in line with the economic, cultural, social and political needs of the people (National Blueprint for Adult and Non-Formal Education in Nigeria, 2012).

Objectives of Adult and Non-Formal Education

The national policy on education (2013) stated the following objectives of adult and non-formal education in Nigeria:

- a. Provide functional basic education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who left school too early.
- b. Provide remedial and life-long education for youths and adults who did not complete secondary education.
- c. Provide in-service, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills.

When these objectives are realized, development not only of individuals but of communities and the nation at large would emerge. This is because with exposure to functional literacy, people would have learnt to use their power to identify and solve their problems with their wisdom, experience and resources with a view to eliminating poverty, pestilence and starvation (Adekunle 2011).

In its efforts, to provide functional literacy the federal government of Nigeria plans a comprehensive mass education programme to achieve functional adult literacy. Mass education deals with the provision of fundamental education including the acquisition of reading, writing and numeracy skills which are to be applied for the development of the individual and the community. The National Blueprint for Adult and Non-formal Education (2012) in Nigeria states the main components of mass education as including the following:

- a. Adult Education:** It is described by NMEC as any learning or educational activity that occurs outside the formal school system and is undertaken by people who are considered to be adults in their

society. Adult education involves, further studies by adults such as sandwich programmes, programmes offered by open universities, training and re-training programmes

b. Non-Formal Adult Education: It is a learning activity organized outside the established framework of the formal school system. It is education meant for out of school adults. It is very wide in scope as it covers training of various types, example, training of food vendors for better food preparation, learning carpentry or the art of sewing. This programme of mass education is closely related to literacy which involves the ability to read, write and compete for informed and organized competence meant to aid the development of active citizenship, improved health and livelihoods. This programme extends into functional literacy, which emphasizes the skill of reading, writing and computing, failure towards one's occupation for better economic productivity. Included in functional literacy also are technological and computer literacy.

Importance of Functional Literacy Education for Development in Nigeria

Functional Literacy Education will bring about development of human beings who will remain central to all development efforts. The major problem facing Nigeria seems to be hunger, poverty, unemployment and under development. The solution lies in adult education since when people are functionally literate, they will think on being self reliant and thus make a living that will lift them above poverty level as it is one of the major objectives of the Nigeria National Development Plans to build a united, strong and self reliant nation. To build this type of nation, there is need for the people to be literate because no nation can be strong with a vast majority of her citizens being illiterate and living in ignorance (Hamma'adama& Sa'idu, 2016).

Adult Education as a whole is heterogeneous in nature; it has wider scope in terms of programmes which will make its beneficiaries/clients functional for development. Example of such programmes is; extension education. This can be divided into agriculture extension service in which farmers are mobilized and educated on how to become better farmers. There is also the health extension service, where people are educated on how to maintain healthy living. When adults endeavor to take the pains of being literate, health issues and how to keep healthy become more meaningful (Anyawu, 1997). Nigeria, whose mainstay economy is agriculture, needs to train enlightened farmers those whose literacy will transform them from subsistence farmers to large scale farmers. With functional literacy for farmers, they would easily grapple with the modern technology and improve on their farming for development. Others include vocational adult education programme which comprises carpentry, black smiting and weaving craft (Hamma'adama, 2012). Etc.

Moreover functional literacy education will provide social movement or social consciousness among citizens. Green, Preston, and Sabates (2003) also reviewed the place of functional literacy adult education in social movements over the centuries. Simon, (as cited in Green, Preston, & Sabates, 2003) states that while, in the 19th century, dominant groups viewed functional education as a force for social order, the subordinate groups looked to functional education as a means of critical awareness, raising consciousness. In line with the mentioned programmes of adult education, if government and education partners would abide, functional literacy education will be provided and development will be achieved.

Challenges of Functional Literacy Education in Nigeria

Achieving functional literacy in Nigeria will mean resuscitating Adult and Non-formal education which had hitherto been neglected in favour of the formal education system in Nigeria. Establishment

of more centres for Adult education in the country should be embarked upon so that everybody will have easy access to education and thus become more functional on their job performance and in the society in which they live, so that the national objectives will be realized and constitutional provision will also be realized which mandated every Nigerian to acquire basic education without discrimination i.e young, adult, male, female, physically challenged and disadvantaged group etc. (FGN, 1999).

Kadiri, (2006) pointed out some challenges of functional Adult literacy in Nigeria;

- i. Poor political will by the government
- ii. Un trained facilitators
- iii. Low image from the people
- iv. In adequate learning centers
- v. Poor funding
- vi. Non involvement of stake holders in the planning of functional illiteracy programmes.

Also, Odumuh, (nd) mentioned some challenges of functional literacy education in Nigeria which include;

- a. Lack of consideration for Socio cultural values and economic patterns of the recipients into the programme.
- b. Poor consideration to train indigenous facilitators who will specifically work and integrate adult functional literacy with community development and for effective communication.
- c. In adequate learning materials

Conclusion

Functional literacy is an agent for development of an individual and to build a strong society. It should therefore, will contribute to the economic growth of the nation if the identified challenges and other more would be tackling. Though previously government made several efforts in order to develop adult functional literacy education for national development because of its important that is attached to the national objectives for development.

Recommendations

The importance of functional adult literacy education cannot be over emphasized for the development of an individual and the nation at large and to achieve this, all Adult education developmental partners and government at all levels in Nigeria therefore, all hands must be on deck. Efforts must be made at the grassroots level through the Local Government

Offices with concerted efforts at the state level to coordinate efforts at all adult education centres and properly fund the programme, while the federal level does not lag behind in funding adult and non-formal education as it does in the case of formal education. Adequate care must be taken to solve all the challenges facing the realization of adult functional literacy.

On the part of the programme coordination, it is important to recognize that there are other needs of the people and that the adult literacy programme can be a good foundation to meeting other proposed needs of the communities. In recognition also of competing factors in the environment, selecting suitable instructional techniques for achievement of the stated objectives of the programme must be uppermost in the minds of the implementers. There is need for continuous monitoring to determine whether or not the programme is providing the expected outcome. Therefore, Adult education should be vigorously pursued since through it, there would be an all round development in the nation

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