

# ADULT EDUCATION IN NIGERIA – THE ISSUE OF NEGLECT

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## Abstract

*Education is very necessary for man in order to articulate himself and achieve fullness. But the formal system of education cannot alone provide all education one needs for self-fulfillment and national development. Within and outside Nigeria, analysts are of the view that the country has the potential to be prosperous. As Nigeria attempts without much success to pull itself out of the quagmire of underdevelopment, the inevitable persistent question has been, given the resources at its disposal, why has the country remained mired in poverty? This paper attempts to provide a partial answer by adducing that Nigeria's inadequate commitment, over the years, to pursue the development of adult education as a strategic objective, as well as an instrument for national development, has been one of the major draw backs to the country's efforts to pull itself out of poverty. Underscoring the role of education as co-terminous with life, the paper proposes an adult education agenda for Nigeria.*

Education is a necessity for the survival of man. The concept of Education suggests development of valuable knowledge and skills in a society. Zuofa (2009) saw the educational system of any society as an elaborate social mechanism designed to bring about in the persons submitted to it certain skills and attitudes that are adjudged to be useful and desirable in the society. As a result of the necessity for education, there has been the view that one who ceases to learn ceases to exist although the one may be living. According to Osuji (2005) to "exist" is more than to 'live' because it means being in the world and at the same time with the world. Thus, one who exists has attributes of transcending, discerning, communicating and participating with others who are existing whereas one who is merely living does not possess these critical attributes. Therefore, one whose development of knowledge ceases has also stopped to exist, he is merely living.

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Being conceived of as an enabling factor opening up many vistas of personal, community and national development, education is generally seen as a necessary instrument. However, despite this realization, there is an erroneous conception of education by some people as a terminal apprenticeship for a working adult life. In Nigeria, despite the fact that in the National policy on Education (NPE) (2004) a well deserved chapter is assigned to Adult and Non-formal Education, this sector has not been fairly treated in practice. Adults who take key decisions, and therefore hold the destinies of the country in their hands, should deserve continuous educational provisions in order to enable them grapple with the enormous problems on their shoulders.

Adult and non-formal education cover every aspect of our educational enterprise, which is neither confined to a classroom situation nor subject to organized strategies, curriculum etc. The major target groups are the unschooled children, illiterate youths and adults, rural dwellers and nomads, farmers etc. Adult and non-formal education have the same aim of making learners literate, thereby helping them to be fruitful citizens of the country so that they can contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation.

Because of its non-formality, Adult and non-formal education are necessary in the third world countries (like Nigeria) where the illiteracy level is still very high. The illiteracy thermometer keeps rising despite the efforts of individuals, state, national or international educational policies and aids. This paper therefore posits that the pervasive poverty in Nigeria partly derives from sustained inadequate commitment to the development of adult and non-formal education in Nigeria. It also proposed an Adult and non-formal education agenda for Nigeria. In fact, we have to demonstrate that education should be a corollary of life in order to achieve optimal disposal of knowledge for attainment of fullness of life.

### **Historical Review of Neglect**

Nigeria was colonized by Britain. The British government had no clearly defined policy on education for Nigeria before 1925. Education activities in the colony were managed by colonial administrators, in consultation with Christian missions and their home offices (Fafunwa, 1974). In 1922, a commission set up by the Phelps-stokes Fund to look into education in West and Equatorial Africa, which included Nigeria, produced a report titled: Education in Africa. The report emphasized the need for a policy on adult and community education (Fafunwa, 1974). The commission's recommendation for the development and institution of a policy on adult and non-formal education represented the first key acknowledgement of the need to develop adult and non-formal education alongside formal education. The commission stressed the education of the entire community if education was to result in meaningful development.

Following the Phelps-stokes report, the British colonial government issued its first education policy for Nigeria in 1925. The policy and its implementation strategies

did not address, in any significant way, community or adult and non-formal education. Rather the colonial government concentrated on school education.

However, in 1951, the central Board of Education endorsed a policy on Adult and non-formal education. The aim as articulated in the policy, was to organize remedial primary education for adults. Following the policy, adult and non-formal literacy classes sprang-up in many parts of Nigeria. There was considerable enthusiasm for adult literacy among the people and the governments of the three regions of Nigeria – East, West and North. The enthusiasm was particularly strong from 1950 to 1956, but the free primary education schemes initiated from 1955 and 1957 resulted in the waning of the enthusiasm and in drastic decline in government support for adult and non-formal education programme. Thus, the first somewhat serious attempt of adult and non-formal education collapsed.

In 1959, the Ashby Commission was appointed to determine Nigeria human resources needs, as well as the country's needs for post secondary education over the next twenty five years, 1960 – 1980. Reviewing Nigeria's primary, secondary and post-secondary education, the commission noted that the country had made progress in these levels and recommended further expansion. The commission was however, curiously silent on adult and non-formal education. Consequently very little attention was paid to its development.

Nigeria became independent in 1960. Since then, there have been several National Development Plans articulating the country's developmental priorities and strategies. None of the plans provided a comprehensive framework and impetus for the development of adult and non-formal education. The Nigerian National Policy on Education was adopted in 1977 and modified in 1981. The policy provides for equal access to education, including continuing and further education, and commits to the eradication of illiteracy and promotion of lifelong learning. Beyond the articulation of desired outcomes, nothing much has been achieved in terms of significant development of adult and non formal education. For instance, 28 years after the adoption of the policy, the literacy rate for Nigerians 15 years and above is about 66% (UNESCO, 2004). There has hardly been a sustainable, virile, and coherently comprehensive set of programmes demonstrating government's commitment to adult education as a strategic priority in Nigeria's development.

Although the National commission for mass literacy, adult and non-formal Education was established in 1990 to monitor and coordinate adult education programmes, as well as to conduct research related to the development of adult and non-formal education in the country, adult and non-formal education programmes continue to operate mainly as desperate, piecemeal activities that are not integrated into a coherent purposeful strategy in pursuit of a national development vision. Many government sponsored adult and non-formal education activities have been chronically anemic due to inadequate funding. Frame-works for organizing and delivering

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programmes are hardly innovative or forward-looking. The lack or inadequacy of physical and instructional facilities in government owned adult and non-formal training centres is indicative of the neglect (Aderinoye, 2002).

Inadequate commitment to the development of adult education is not only unique to Nigeria; it is a typical phenomenon in most African countries. A number of factors account for the underdevelopment of adult and non-formal education and education generally in Africa. They include “the constraints of funding, lack of continuity of policy, increasing huge debt, problem of gender and language (Omolewa 2002).

### **Education is Co-Terminus with Life**

Education should be seen as a continuum and this necessitates redefinition of the role of formal education. Formal education should not be seen as a knowledge filling station to which the young ones come in order to get their supply of knowledge and skills which will serve them for the rest of their lives (Richmond, 1979). Man is biologically and physically unfinished requiring his life to be an unending process of completion and learning. Thus, one’s personality is constituted from a complex of biological, physiological, geographical, cultural, sociological, economic and professional data, which differ from other individuals.

Nnazor (2005) has argued that knowledge is socially grounded, and that a large part of it arises from the simple fact of living over a total lifetime, hence emphasis should be placed on individual having full participation in knowledge process in the society. Also, he argues that if knowledge is firmly set in a context of social interaction then life should become a process of continuing negotiations through which open access to knowledge resources in a society is gained. It needs to be added that the extent to which one could be described as being knowledgeable depends on his personality which is characterized by his exhibition of fullness at any point in time.

The implication of the above analysis is that the idea of acquiring, at only a particular stage, a set of intellectual or technical equipment valid for a long time is out of date. This accentuates the need for a new conception of education as learning to live, learning to learn, so as to absorb new knowledge all through life; learning to think freely and critically, so as to enable man to be himself and attain fullness (Dike, 2001). According to Dewey (1916) as one acts or interacts with his environment he acquires knowledge which he uses for subsequent actions. Education should necessarily equip one to organize every reality into action and thought.

The realization of the need for educational provisions throughout life has led different bodies to coin out different terms for it. These include continuing education, recurrent education, permanent education and lifelong education. Each of these terms could be used interchangeably with others. However, there could be some special emphasis between one and another. For instance, all agree that education should be a

cafeteria system where the appetite of everybody should be catered for at any point in time. Continuing education emphasizes more on the provisions for any purpose after the cessation of the formal schooling. Recurrent education, on the other hand, is a conception of the optimum disposal of knowledge resources and learning facilities, for the maximum benefit of society (Anowor, Ezema & Umezulike 2001). But lifelong education, the background of which was laid by the report of the World Survey of Education chaired by Edgar Faure (1972) includes all that other terms mean but emphasizes on the integration of formal, adult, non-formal and informal educational provisions as each contributes to the overall Educational acquisition by an individual. Some elements of lifelong education emphasize, according to Cropley (1979), that education should:

- i. last the whole life of each individual;
- ii. lead to the systematic acquisition, renewal, upgrading and completion of knowledge, skills and attitudes made necessary by the constantly changing conditions in which people now live;
- iii. have as its ultimate goal, the promotion of the self fulfillment of an individual.
- iv. be dependent for its successful implementation on people's increasing ability and motivation to engage in self-directed learning activities
- v. acknowledge the contributions of all available educational influences, including formal, non-formal and informal education.

Thus, lifelong education, as a principle and a master concept of education, focuses on the entire life span, the phenomenon of ever occurring change, attainment of self-fulfillment by man, and possession of skills and ability to acquire lifelong learning by every individual.

### **The Role of Adult Education**

The issue of adult education concerns the illiterates who have never been to school and different completers of the formal education at different levels. Every person no matter the level of education attained needs adult education of one type or another. Hence, adult education is basically defined as any education programme designed for people regarded as adults in their communities. This is designed for people who are mentally mature and are socially responsible. For the illiterates, literacy education is designed so as to afford them some development for self-fulfillment through attainment of literacy skill. Thus literacy education is a great means of integrating the illiterates with the communities of the literate world thereby helping them to communicate with both the living and the dead resulting in their attainment of self-fulfillment.

But literacy is just an aspect of adult education. The continuing aspect is as wide as the world itself when people drop out of the formal system at whatever level, they should ideally drop into the adult education or non formal education at an appropriate level. That is, on dropping out from any level, one continues his education through adult education.

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For instance, in the National Policy on Education (NPE. 1998), the objectives of the Adult and Non-formal education section are: provision of literacy education for adults who have never had the advantage of any formal education; drop out of the formal school system; further or continuing education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills; in-service on the job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills, and giving adult citizens necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment. As a matter of fact, these objectives are very comprehensive and laudable. If the objectives are fully implemented the country will be on the right path of adult education for the benefits of adults in the country. However adult education generally has not been fully backed up by the government over the years. Compared with other sectors, it has not been fairly treated in financial transactions (Okedara 1980, Osuji 2005).

It should be realized that while the formal system of education is selective, elitist and discriminatory, adult education takes care of a wider cliental and is non-discriminatory in any society. For instance, the formal system takes care of the youth in the perspective of the apprenticeship model of education; that is education for preparing the youth for a working adult life. But adult education takes care of a person's whole life. It caters for the educational aspirations of every adult at any point in time.

Among the characteristic features of adults include mental maturity and social responsibility. It is through adult education that adults are helped to be mentally articulate so as to be able to understand issues and judge rightly, and are enabled to perceive reality and creditably discharge their social roles as parents, uncles and leaders. This results in improved quality of life of which modern society is blessed with.

Thus, the role of adult education towards attainment of fullness of life fulfillment could be described in different ways. It could be described as complementary or supplementary. It plays a complementary role because it stabilizes ones educational attainment as it provides constant refinement of knowledge and skills. On the other hand, it plays a supplementary role as it takes over from where the formal system stops. It could also be conceived as a second chance or remedial to those who missed the opportunity for formal education.

Another way to conceive the role of adult education is in the context of horizontal and vertical dimensions. Vertically, at whatever age an adult finds himself, adult education is his companion as he interacts and gains experience. Horizontally, one's association with other people either in the smaller or the wider society, adult education enables him to attain education non-formally. Thus, the totality of one's education is not to be seen from the formal education institution that he attended but mainly from the non-formal education opportunities afforded him. Hence adult education would be seen as making continuous provision for all the people within a society so as to make them up

to date in their knowledge and skills, refine their thoughts and make them understand issues and fully be in control of their destinies.

### **Adult Education Agenda**

An adult education for Nigeria would entail the development and implementation of a systematic adult education policy. The policy would be guided both in conception and implementation by a philosophy of continuing education or lifelong learning. A responsively comprehensive adult education policy should seek to institute and sustain a culture of learning that will lead to the emergence of a learning society (Edwards, 1993). As Nigerian adults grapple with the problems and opportunities in their personal lives, they are simultaneously challenged to contribute to the development of their communities and society. Hence, lifelong learning becomes imperative, not only for the effective functioning of individuals at the workplace and in their own communities, but also for the renewal of society itself. A systematic and comprehensive adult education policy would among others pursue the following key objectives:

- **Provision of Incentives for Adult Participation:** Adults are generally saddled with occupational and familial concerns in a country like Nigeria, where poverty is currently pervasive; people are preoccupied with how to eke out a living. Consequently, motivating adults to participate in education and training programmes that are not employer-sponsored would require a variety of incentives, such as subsidized child care services especially in the cities, flexible scheduling and career and personal guidance services.
- **Coherence of Programmes:** In most developing countries, adult education programmes are not integrated to ensure a relationship among the programmes, and to ensure that each programme, at once, addresses the needs of adult participants, as well as the needs of society. Coherence would also seek to ensure that the programme or service prospective participants' needs are available. The policy would have a unifying mission as well as organizational structural mechanism for coordinating programmes and activities.
- **Comprehensiveness of Offerings** There is the tendency in developing countries to concentrate efforts in adult education on literacy or basic education. If the talents and abilities of the adult population are to be developed, mobilized and optimally utilized in national development, there must be comprehensive education and training opportunities for adults. A variety of professional, vocational and general education programmes and courses must be available and affordable. These include:
  - (i) Personal development and family management: Responsive adult education should aim at helping adult to make informed choices in managing their personal and familial concern. Adult education for personal development would provide learners guidance on how to access information regarding issues, such as health, nutrition, family planning etc.
  - (ii) Civil and peace Education: Citizens need to understand how government functions, and what their responsibilities and rights are. They should know the

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procedures they can utilize to influence or constrain their leaders. Civic education programmes would help to bring about a more politically aware citizenry.

- (iii) Community development education: Given that about 64 percent of Nigerians live in rural communities (United Nations Development Programme 2004), responsive adult education programme can be utilized to raise people's consciousness and make them aware of their circumstances and opportunities. Community development education programmes could be developed around them, such as leadership, stewardship, self-help, team work, accountability and so on.
- (iv) Entrepreneurship education: Viewed broadly entrepreneurship education aims at equipping learners with skills, knowledge and dispositions that can help them develop or implement innovative social or business plans. It could also help to reduce the high rate of unemployment in both urban and rural areas of Nigeria, by equipping adults with the knowledge and skills for setting up and running small businesses effectively. Entrepreneurship education that proactively prepares learners for an unpredictable world cannot only help to overcome dependence and hopelessness but also stimulate the emergence of an enterprising culture that values creativity, flexibility, self-employment and self-sufficiency.
- (v) Literacy: Nigeria cannot develop in any significant way if the majority of Nigerians are not first considerably developed. Literacy is critical to the development of individual Nigerians and the Country. Therefore adult education should aim at making the teeming population of Nigeria to be literate.

- **Content and Pedagogy Quality**

In keeping with the philosophy of lifelong learning, a responsive and systematic adult education policy would require continual review of both content and method of delivery of programmes in order to ensure their currency, appropriateness and effectiveness. The relevance of content to both the needs of the learners and of the economy or society should be a key factor in judging quality of content especially in personal social and economic programmes. Quality of pedagogy would be judged among other things, by the extent to which teaching methods adhere to the principles of constructivism (Orstein and Hunkins, 2004).

## **Research and Evaluation**

A purposeful and systematic adult education policy would need, for its continuing effectiveness and developments an ongoing and methodical process of gathering and analyzing data about its operations. Research and evaluation would seek to answer questions like, to what extent are the various adult education programmes meeting their stated goals? What is the impact of the programme on the quality of life and the economy? What are the barriers to participation in each programme? How might the system and its programmes be improved?

## **Conclusion**

Education is a necessity for man in order to articulate himself and achieve fullness. But the formal education system, which is elastic and discriminatory cannot alone help man to attain all education he needs for achievement of self-fulfillment.



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 national 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 development. To cater for the educational aspirations of all citizens of Nigeria, adult education plays a very important role. It provides for the interests of beneficiaries and non beneficiaries of the formal system. Thus adult education plays both complementary and supplementary roles as it takes over from where the formal system stops. Consequently, Nigeria should heighten efforts in adult education so as to offer citizens opportunities to attain self-fulfillment and fullness in the twenty-first century.

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