
The Commercialization of Adult Education in a Dwindling Economy

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Abstract

This paper is an exploration of the Commercialization of Adult Education in a Dwindling Economy. The concept of commercialization was examined. It was also established that commercialization derived its impetus from the neo-liberalism of the 70s and 80s. the ideology presumed a commodification of education; which should be organised and subjected to the principles of demand and supply of a market economy. This paper also discussed some basic definitions of Adult Education. The values of Adult Education were presented with a view to attracting patronage and acceptability. It also discussed some challenges. One of the many challenges militating against the commercialization of adult education is the attitude of government to the funding of the sector. The position of many government practitioners is that the sector does not deliver clear economic benefits. This paper, however, observed that a quick look at any adult education programme will show courses that increase people's competence, confidence, self-sufficiency and general well-being. In purely economic terms this means that people are more productive because they are healthier, motivated and more competent. Therefore, the paper recommended that, apart from sustained and proper funding of adult education; there should be intensified and sustained

advocacy, sensitization and mobilization of all stake holders to come and support Adult and Non-Formal Education in the country.

Keywords: commercialization, adult education, dwindling, economy, definitions, values, challenges, recommendations.

The dominance of adults in all human societies has virtually made this world an “adult world”. They are not only more in the population, but hold the key positions in homes, government and society at large, which underscores the need for greater attention to be given to their education. For denying them education automatically means that a larger segment of our population would run the risk of being uneducated or functionally illiterate. Unfortunately, this seems to be the case in Nigeria; as successive governments have continued to pay lip service to the sector. Adult Education Practitioners have over the years drawn attention to the chronic underfunding of this vital sector of education. This paper will stimulate proper thinking towards re-ordering educational priorities from the present pattern of “robbing Peter to pay Paul” to seeing “value in patronizing the education of the adults who provide all of the human and material resources for education and national development in the scheme of things. This is more pertinent in this period when the paucity of funds is whittling down the chances of meeting standard requirements for quality education. The paper therefore examines the option of commercialization as a way of boosting the funding and general patronage of adult education especially at a time when the country is going through a dwindling economy.

Commercialization and Adult Education

Commercialization is a global phenomenon; and has attracted increased research interest in the last decade. Commercialization reflects back to the era of neo-liberalism in the 70s and 80s, an ideology which seeks to implement basic market principles in all areas of social life. Many scholars in education have analysed the ways neo-liberalism influences education policies and practices. Neo-liberalism presumes a commodification of education, so that education can be directly organised as a market exchange and subjected to the principles of supply and demand of the market economy. (Ball, 2007).

This philosophy presents commercialization as the solution of everything, which would include social security, health care, education - adult education inclusive-, the ownership and maintenance of toll-roads, railways, airlines, energy production, communication systems and the flow of money. The assumption is that if free enterprise is allowed to make its way into every corner of human existence, the results will be better overall for everyone, even for those who are temporarily disadvantaged. (Barrios, 2012).

Contributing, Burch (2009) noted that commercialization is the process of involving an activity in commerce. Commercialization is the process that is involved in making a product commercially successful. The process involves the production, dissemination, sales, marketing and support necessary to commercialize the product or activity.

It presupposes the stressing and highlighting of the values of a product or service to attract patronage and acceptability. It is this perspective of this paper on the commercialization of adult education.

What is Adult Education?

Adult education, has varied definitions for varied social settings (Ezimah,2004). However, UNESCO's international conference in Nairobi, Kenya, (1976) as reported in Nzeneri (2010:10) defines adult education as:

The entire body of organized educational process, whatever the content, level and method, formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications and bring about changes in their attitude or behaviour in the two fold perspectives of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development.

This definition is indeed comprehensive. It reveals the meaning, content and scope of adult education and it has also influenced many nation's philosophy of education, such as Nigeria, as revealed in her National Policy on Education (FRN,2004) in which the goals of mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education are:

1. To provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education;
2. Provide functional and remedial education for those young people who did not complete secondary education;
3. Provide education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills;
4. Provide in-service, on-the-job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills, and
5. Give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

In sum, all educational programmes involving functional literacy, advanced literacy, leisure education, extramural studies, remedial education, women education, extension education, second chance education, informal life-long education, distance education, peace education, citizenship education, reproductive education, family planning education, population education, aesthetic education, prison education, just to mention but a few, are one form of adult education or the other.

Adult Education and a Dwindling Economy

Noko (2011) observed that a dwindling national economy is characterised by cash liquidity squeezes and scarcities, galloping and rapid inflation, underfunding of development sectors, heightened corruption, and poor budgetary commitments. He maintained that the situation affects education funding in diverse ways.

He stressed that budgetary releases for funding education become inconsistent in a dwindling economy. With delayed and non-release of appropriated funds for both capital and recurrent expenditure requirements of education, the sub-sectors, such as Adult Education, also go into crises resulting to inadequacy of basic teaching and learning facilities.

Delayed salaries, non-payment of emoluments to facilitators for conducting the routine teaching and learning activities, struggle for use of facilities and poor maintenance of facilities become the order of the day in the adult education centres.. Staff and learners' morale become increasingly dampened, leading to drop outs, poor commitment and abridged staff quality.

The situation becomes more serious for adult education given the apparent lack of commitment government at all levels show to the funding of the sector. This paper believes that Adult Education sector needs to prove its worth in financial terms if it is going to compete with other parts of the education system.

All over the country, numerous adult learning projects are highly successful in equipping learners with crucial skills. Adult learning and education can give people a better understanding of health conditions; give them better knowledge of the available treatments and more skills to manage their health. Simply put, those engaged in adult learning are better able to take care of themselves. Adult learning also benefits the workplace, allowing learners access to the labour market and advancement. It also benefits communities.

So why, then, has so little changed over its funding over the years; as it has continued to suffer from chronic underfunding? Why has the adult learning community not managed to win favour with successive governments to make sure it is well-funded and supported to benefit people all over the country equally?

This, surely, is one thing that is worth scaling up. How much does Nigeria benefit from adult learning? How much would it lose if schemes across the country were unable to offer those opportunities?

Some schools of thought have posited that such attitude may not be unconnected to the fact that our policy makers and administrators, at the various strata of government, do not possess sufficient knowledge on the potentials and values of adult education in national development. Thus, this paper will explore its values for the individual and for national development as a way of stimulating patronage and acceptability of Adult Education.

The Values of Adult Education

Adult education is a very good way to help sustain and improve society; it is relatively low cost and can easily be justified by its many benefits.

In discussing the many problems confronting adult education as a sector, the revelation of Steven Joyce, Tanzanian Education Minister, quoted in (Mbunda, 2011) becomes quite instructive. She said:

Although adult education courses benefited students, it was a question of whether taxpayers should foot the bill. We support continuing education and will continue to support courses that deliver clear economic benefits. We simply cannot justify spending millions of dollars of taxpayers' money on courses that do not clearly deliver these benefits.

The assertion explains the glaring apathy shown by government, especially in third world countries, to the funding of adult education.

The reaction of this paper to the above is, first, why does everything have to have an economic benefit, what about social and environmental benefits? The reason citizens pay taxes for a variety of infrastructure, services and amenities is that they would otherwise not be available in a purely commercial system.

Second, many adult education classes teach skills that support self-sufficiency. Courses that teach cooking, clothes-making, gardening, exercise, natural health care, and medication all help improve the well-being of people. Being self-sufficient does not show up in measures of GDP though, perhaps that is why it is not valued by policy-makers.

Third, it can be argued that all education has an economic benefit either directly and/or indirectly. Adult education courses offer benefits far beyond short-term returns on investment. A quick look at any adult education programme will show courses that increase people's competence, confidence, self-sufficiency and general well-being. In purely economic terms this means that people are more productive because they are healthier, motivated and more competent.

In addition to learning opportunities, adult classes also provide people with opportunities for social interaction, networking, collaboration and sharing, all of which help the health of the economy and of society in general.

Contributing, Eya, Ugwu&Alu(2010) outlined the values of adult education on a general note as follows:

1. Adult education provides literacy and numeracy to illiterate members of society who missed the opportunity of receiving formal education at the pre-primary and primary levels of education. It affords this large army of illiterates the opportunity to receive literacy skills.
2. Adult education complements and also supplements formal education. This means that fortunate school drop-outs can join the mainstream of formal education again through adult education programmes. By this act these drop-outs have the opportunity of gaining knowledge and skills which they will use to better themselves and the society.

3. Adult education, apart from providing functional literacy and numeracy, is also a source of employment for the recipients. This means that the adult learner on graduation can get employed to work as a messenger, cleaner and the like in establishments. They can also work as machine operators having learnt to read instructions on the machines and manuals. These recipients of adult education can, through these means, get their daily bread and live more comfortable lives.

4. Adult education enables people to be self-reliant. Having acquired knowledge and vocational skills, the learners can establish small scale businesses on their own. These adults who in developing countries, are born and bred in a cultural setting devoid of written and scientific skills need to move into this new world of scientific thinking and written culture. This new culture demands new skills, new attitudes, new orientation as well as new competencies which will promote awareness for a change to a better lifestyle.

5. Adult education liberates the minds of the learners. It makes them feel free and safe from the shackles of traditional dogmatism hinged on unfounded taboos. These graduates of adult education classes and programmes will be able to see clearer, think more meaningfully and act wisely in their civic rights and responsibilities, in their everyday life and living and by so doing they will understand and appreciate their environment better.

6. Adult education paves the way for development. If the white-man's secret (reading and writing) is known in all nooks and crannies of human society by all the people, even development can be near assured. Such societal problems as rural-urban drift, unhealthy habits, unproductive life, lack of knowledge of what to do culturally and spiritually with our lives and talents will be minimized and eventually vanish through the genuine efforts of adult education programmes.

7. Adult education is not meant for illiterate adults only. It also serves the educated who seek more knowledge and skills. It therefore provides in-service and on-the-job vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills. (National Policy on Education, 2004). Our world is always in a constant flux. It is ever changing. It has changed primitive civilization through stone, iron or metal to industrial revolution and to scientific age. It has again changed from the simple scientific age to jet the computer age, and Internet age.

In order to keep abreast with the time in which one finds oneself, one has to update one's knowledge and skills so as to appreciate the aesthetic, cultural and civic education prevalent at a given time for effective living in society.

It is in the light of the above that Knowles (1977) succinctly sums the functions of adult education as follows:

There are many things adults ought to know in order to survive, in order to be employable, in order to stay healthy, in order to be happy and in order to be good citizens. Adult education rather than formal education helps them to achieve these.

The Challenges to the Commercialization of Adult Education

There are many barriers and challenges to the commercialization of Adult Education delivery in Nigeria. Some of them are discussed below:

(i) There is the failure of government at all levels to give adequate recognition to Adult and Non-Formal Education as a key sector of basic education. It is surprising to note that, the very notion held by people about the scope and objectives of adult education over two centuries ago are still being used in managing the programs. Adult Education programs are plagued with lack of structural clarity, hence making such plans weak and ineffective. It has been more difficult streamlining the learning needs of the various categories of illiterate populations, much less an assessment of future needs and how best to meet them.

(ii) In Adult Education, the activities are seen as ad hoc without long-term implications. Most Adult Education learning centres are cited in public schools with little or no comfort. This practice is inconsistent with Okenimkpe's (2003) of factors necessary for effective adult teaching and learning, such as "suitable meeting places, suitable furniture, suitable amount of light, suitable adult facilitators etc.

(iii) Adult literacy programs are not systematic. Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education lack the organisational means for bringing different forms of adult education within the control of educational planning, since educational planning for now, is limited to activities of the formal education

(iv) The budgetary allocation to adult education at all levels of government is grossly inadequate especially when compared to the formal education sector. More importantly Non-Formal Education is excluded in the share of two percent consolidated fund meant for Basic Education in spite of policy provision.

(v) There is also the challenge that bothers on lack of mobilization. Many interesting learners are not aware of the existence of the adult education centres and even the programmes they are supposed to enrol. This affects seriously efforts to achieve Education for All. Even there are some philanthropists who are willing to contribute their own quota but due to lack of advocacy and mobilization they cannot do so.

(vi) Lack or inadequate number of literacy instructors or personnel who possess Information and Communication Technology skills is a serious challenge to Nigeria's desire of becoming a key player in the information age. Lack of personnel with Information and Communication Technology skills across the Non-Formal Education centres inhibits the effective use of Information and Communication Technology for Non-formal Education delivery in the country.

(vii) There is the dearth of skilled manpower in the area of monitoring and evaluation: lack of trained monitoring and evaluation personnel in the Non-formal education sector is a serious problem to the development of the sector since monitoring is a sine qua non to a successful adult and Non-formal education programmes. It involves the management of a large database. Monitoring is vital ingredient for successful implementation of NFE as such it should be integrated in the programme

action plan. Adequate funds are not provided and required information about the status of the programmes is not available. Due to lack of proper monitoring and evaluation in the Non-formal education has resulted in variations in the types of programmes available and offered across the states of the federation.

Conclusion

Adult education aims at improving the situation of people by increasing their skills, knowledge and awareness. It is the adult that could transform the nations not children. The development of any nation depends on the quality of adults that the nation has. Adult education brings a great sense of dignity and self-esteem, enhances respect of others, and the ability to take control of one's life and a greater desire to participate in society.

This paper explored the values of adult education; recognizing that it is the appreciation of the value or worth of a product that will increase its commercialization in a competitive market. The paper also examined some of the many challenges confronting Adult education. The intention is to join its voice with numerous others to call on stakeholders, for the reduction, if not total eradication of the cankerworms that have been a clog in the wheel of progress for adult education. The paper also proffered solutions which it believes, if implemented, will re-position adult education to meet the ever increasing demand of its time and to enable the nation reap the social and economic benefits of this all-important sector.

Suggestions

In view of the foregoing the following suggestions are made:

- (i) Government and other stakeholders should consider as matter of urgency the proper funding of Adult Education if it must realize its potentials for the individuals and the nation. A lot of political will and commitment on the part of government is strongly recommended; if it must eradicate the poverty ravaging the nation at the moment.
- (ii) Adult Education should perhaps examine its disciples, its courses, activities and programs; and their relevance with a view to meeting the modern challenges of globalization. It may be useful to introduce continuing education and professional development courses for all departments and colleges; in areas such as tourism, health, nutrition, citizenship, small business management possibly through collaboration.
- (iii) Nigeria needs to emulate the example of the industrialized countries of the West, where access is an integral part of quality education. In this regard, mass education, with a major literacy component for sustainable development, should be made available and accessible to the population. Establishment of more centres of adult education in the country should be embarked upon so that everybody will have easy access to education and thus acquire new skills or become more functional on their jobs. It should also be made affordable to all interesting adult learners. Some

programmes like the Basic and Post literacy programmes be free at all the states of the federation; and the programmes should be based on the learners' needs and aspirations.

(iv) We draw the attention of the government and other stake holders to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which listed the right to education as one of the fundamental rights of a citizen. Therefore, education, especially Adult Literacy, should be made available in the right quality and quantity.

(v) Recruitment of adequate and qualified facilitators with at least a Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) and specialization in adult education should be employed as facilitators in the Non-Formal Education centres. More capacity building programmes (pre-service, in-service and on-the-job-training) for Adult and Non-Formal Education personnel at all levels should be put in place. Effective programming and implementation would require appropriately qualified personnel with definite schedules of duty.

(vi) There should be intensified and sustained advocacy, sensitization and mobilization of all stake holders to come and support Adult and Non-Formal Education in the country.

(vii) Regular and effective monitoring of programmes at all levels should be carried on. It is essential to train and re-train manpower to manage Monitoring and Evaluation activities in the Non-formal Education. There should be capacity building for monitoring and evaluation of officers through short, medium and long term training programmes, workshops, conferences amongst others.

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