
**IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR
SUSTAINABLE GROWTH, SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN
AFRICA**

JAMES OJOWU OCHIM, Ph.D
*Department of Curriculum Studies
College of Education Oju, Benue State*

VICTORIA AFOMA IFEANACHO, Ph.D
*Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education
Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze
Anambra State*

MARY OGAYI OTOJA
*Department of Curriculum Studies
College of Education Oju, Benue State*

And

UKO FRANCIS ADEKA, Ph.D
*Department of Educational Foundations and Management, College of
Education Oju, Benue State*

Abstract

The spate of insecurity and underdevelopment in Africa has dominated international discourse for some time now. It is however, not too far to locate the root cause of insecurity and underdevelopment to an army of idle hands occasioned by illiteracy who soon become ready hands for instability. This paper posits that improving the quality of continuing education can engender sustainable growth, security and development. The continuing education programme can be effectively employed as means to empower the army of unskilled people and engage them meaningfully to sustainable development. Using documentary sources, the paper highlights two indicators of quality in continuing education, namely teacher quality and facility availability; identifies areas of competency that need to be stressed for quality continuing education; and makes suggestions for effective implementation.

Keywords: Continuing education, Quality, Sustainable growth, Security, Development

Education is an instrument of development in all its ramifications. It is about the only means by which all indices of development are driven. Every nation of the world thus, owes it a responsibility to reduce the rate of illiteracy in its domain and empower its people accordingly through some forms of education. Conventionally, education is provided to children as early as three years or less; and this continues through primary to tertiary level. But, the reality is that so many people are left behind. They have lost the opportunity for formal education until adult or might have dropped out along the line and could not attain an appreciable level of education that will enable them contribute meaningfully to national development. It is estimated that 781 million adults across the world have low literacy and numeracy skills (European Association for the Education of Adults, 2016). Many more cannot use digital tools confidently in everyday life. This category of people is too large to be ignored. Without meaningful education, these individuals are at greater risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Thus, it is through some form of remedial programme like continuing education that this set of people can be integrated meaningfully in to socio-economic fabrics of the society.

Continuing education is meant to fill the gap occasioned by lack of opportunity at the earlier stages of life. Basically, continuing education addresses the following groups:

- People who for cultural, social and economic reasons have not attended any formal school;
- People who dropped out of formal education before they could complete junior certificate level;
- People who, though they might have reached junior certificate to enable them continue to senior secondary school;
- Literate groups (employed or unemployed) who need education for mobility of labour, updating of knowledge to meet up with the dynamic nature of the society in various areas like political, economic, social, cultural aesthetic, civic, religious, especially in this computer age (Akinde,1999).

The sphere of continuing education is large. The avenues for the provision of this mode of learning include part-time programme, sandwich programme, correspondence courses, etc. The flexible nature of this mode enables the

individual to combine education with other engagements without sacrificing either.

For continuing education programme to meet the set objectives, however the issue of quality must be given a pride of place. Quality is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or services that bear on its ability to satisfy stated needs (World Organization of Standardization, 2014). Quality in education is a measure of how good or bad the products of higher education institutions in Nigeria are in terms of their academic performance and meeting established standards (Asiyai & Oghuvbu, 2019). Improving the quality of continuing education programme is a prerequisite for sustainable growth, security and development in Africa. Continuing education programmes should enable the individual to participate actively in the development of his country; to contribute meaningfully to economic growth and sustainability and as means to secure the future of Africa.

Indices of Quality in Continuing Education

The concept of quality has attracted many definitions from several scholars. Kalusi, (2011) argued that quality is a complex concept and there is hardly any consensus. According to DuBrin, (2017), quality is a desirable attribute of a product or service that distinguishes it from the person seeking the attribute. Viewed from this definition, quality could be said to have the attribute of worth and acceptance. Nevertheless, DuBrin maintained that good quality should possess the characteristics of conformance to expectation, conformance to requirement, excellence and value. The Article 11 of the World Declaration on Education, (2013) sees quality as a multi-dimensional concept which should encompass all the functions and activities in schools. Such activities of higher educational institutions have been highlighted as teaching, research and scholarship, community service, staffing, students, infrastructures and educational facilities, equipment and the academic environment (World Conference on Higher Education, 2008).

High quality delivery is a prerequisite for effective productivity in education industry and hence quality education is an instrument for effecting national development. According to Ekong (2006), quality builds knowledge, live skills, perspectives, attitudes and values. When quality education is delivered high enough to meet set standards, the products of education should be able to perform well in the world of work in real life situation. When quality is low, performance cannot meet the set standards.

Quality is also viewed as sharing similar meaning with competence. According to Chanchai (2009), competency is group of knowledge, skill, attitude, belief, habit, motivation, and personality being hidden in the persons, which would be reflected to be visible from their working behaviour, as measurable and observable (Chanchai, 2009). In other words, quality or competence is observable and comprises several indices. Quality is having knowledge, skills and attitudes required to perform duties of a specific profession.

One of the areas of concern for quality in continuing education programme is the status of teachers. It has been stated that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers (FRN's National Policy on Education, 2013). In the Nigerian school system, teacher quality could be examined in various ways. It could be examined in terms of teacher's qualification and teachers' competence. The teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) categorized teacher qualification into four, namely, Category A: Doctoral Teachers (Holders of PhD in Education or PhD in other field plus teaching qualification e.g. Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE); Professional Diploma in Education (PDE); Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE); Category B: Master Teachers (Holders of Masters Degree in Education or Masters Degree in other fields plus a teaching qualification, e.g. PGDE, PDE, NCE; Category C: Graduate Teachers (Holders of Bachelors Degree in Education or Bachelors Degree in other field plus a teaching qualification, e.g. PGDE, PDE, NCE; and Category D: NCE Teachers (Holders of the Nigeria Certificate in Education which is the national minimum teaching qualification. It is assumed that the higher the qualification, the higher the teacher competence to discharge his duties. Teacher quality could also be examined in terms of teachers' teaching experience (Adeyemi, 2017). It could as well be examined in terms of teacher's integrity and teacher's job performance (Wilson & Pearson, 2013). Teacher quality also has been related to content knowledge and communication skill (Okoli, 2017). The teacher needs deep knowledge of content and the ability to communicate this content in an effective manner. The Turkish Ministry of National Education (2016, p. 2) noted that:

Our teachers are expected to have sufficient subject-specific knowledge, to convey this knowledge to their students through a constructivist approach in line with the new programme, to have skills for collaboration with colleagues and communication with students together with administrative and organisational skills, and

to efficiently exchange information with all concerned stakeholders, especially with families (p.2).

A survey of students' perception of most valuable teacher qualities indicates the following: knowledge transfer, knowledge evaluation (assessment), teacher accessibility and personal trait (Okafor, 2017). Based on an informal survey conducted with BCIT (2010) Trades and Technology students, the top five qualities students want in an instructor are: willingness to take extra time to answer questions and solve problems; well organized presentations and lessons; real world experience; respect for students; and a sense of humour. For Anderson (2014), characteristics associated with effective teachers may be grouped into four clusters namely, professionalism, thinking/reasoning, expectation and leadership.

Teacher quality indicated by the proxies in the foregoing therefore is important for effective continuing education programme.

Another concern for quality in continuing education programme borders on the facilities for effective running of the programme. It is expected that facilities used in the running of continuing education programme should approximate those found in similar conventional programmes. Any discrepancy in term of facility provision will undermine the quality of the programme as well as the products. Ekundayo (2015) reported that availability of school physical facilities and the conduciveness of the school learning environment are potent factors influencing students' achievement in the affective and the psychomotor domains. It should be pointed out that these domains, though often neglected in favour of the cognitive, are important for all round development of the individual. Continuing education learners are coming back to school to fill some gaps in their world; it is the responsibility of the school to assist them to fill these gaps in all ramifications. Unfortunately, even in conventional education programmes, there is dearth of facilities for meaningful learning. Students sit on the ground to receive lessons. Many of the classrooms, laboratories, libraries, playing grounds are in a terrible state of despair. Teaching and learning take place under a most uncondusive environment, lacking basic materials. These deteriorating conditions are a disservice to quality continuing education.

Continuing Education for Sustainable Growth, Security and Development

Continuing education can be a veritable instrument for sustainable growth, security and development in Africa. Development implies change or growth in a people's life style. It could also mean a change or an increase in the

structural facilities of a people, community or society (Edet & Beyin, 2018). Development is the power of the people to solve their problems with their own wisdom, knowledge, experience and resources with a view to eliminating poverty, pestilence and starvation. This presupposes that development is not accidental; it sprouts from some form of plan and thrives on certain conditions, one of which is security.

Insecurity is antithetical to meaningful development. Nothing good can come out from a state of insecurity. Every nation thus strives to maintain an appreciable level of security in order to engender the kind of development it desires. Security is a state of well-being characterized by freedom from danger, risk, lack, uncertainties etc. (Nwankwo, 2013). Today, every country is grappling with insecurity ranging from political upheavals to insurgency. This situation has continued to raise concern about the sustainability of development. Sustainable development has come to mean the ability to ensure that development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Adejo, 2019). This definition acknowledges that while development may be necessary to meet human needs and improve the quality of life, it must happen without depleting the capacity of the natural environment to meet present and future needs. What is the need for today's robust effort if it cannot see tomorrow?

It is however, a popular thinking that education can bring about sustainable development, increased security and economic growth. Audu, Lukman and Muhammed (2014) state that education is central to shaping attitudes and social interaction and both are critical to addressing insecurity challenges and sustainable development. For this to happen, continuing education should yield to the transformative education that is needed for societal rejuvenation. Adejo (2019) identified key competencies necessary for sustainable development which such education must dwell to include:

- Systems thinking competency: the ability to recognize and understand relationships, to analyze complex systems, to perceive the ways in which systems are embedded within different domains and different scales, and to deal with uncertainty;
- Anticipatory competency: the ability to understand and evaluate multiple futures – possible, probable and desirable – and to create one's own visions for the future, to apply the precautionary principle, to assess the consequences of actions, and to deal with risks and changes;
- Normative competency: the ability to understand and reflect on the norms and values that underlie one's actions and to negotiate

sustainability values, principles, goals and targets, in a context of conflicts of interests and trade-offs, uncertain knowledge and contradictions;

- Strategic competency: the ability to collectively develop and implement innovative actions that further sustainability at the local level and further afield;
- Critical thinking competency: the ability to question norms, practices and opinions; reflect on own one's values, perceptions and actions; and take a position in the sustainability discourse;
- Self-awareness competency: the ability to reflect on one's own role in the local community and (global) society, continually evaluate and further motivate one's actions, and deal with one's feelings and desires;
- Integrated problem-solving competency: the overarching ability to apply different problem-solving frameworks to complex sustainability problems and develop viable, inclusive and equitable solution that promotes sustainable development – integrating the above-mentioned competencies.

This list is not exhaustive of all competencies required for continuing education for sustainable development; it however highlights competencies that are particularly essential for sustainability and which have not been the main focus of contemporary formal education.

Conclusion

The paper has addressed the issue of improving quality of continuing education for sustainable growth, security and development in Africa. It highlights two main indices of quality in continuing education which are the concern for human and material resources for effective implementation of programmes. It argues for key competencies required for sustainable development through the continuing education programme; and finally suggests means to achieving quality of the continuing education programme.

Recommendations

In order to improve the quality of continuing education for sustainable growth, security and development in Africa, the paper suggests as follows:

1. Continuing education should focus on a variety of issues such as health, human rights, conflict resolution, ethics, gender, poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability to mention but a few.

2. Sustainable development issues/concepts should be taught in continuing education in ways that they become the core of people's lives.
3. People – students, community members, professionals and practitioners should be encouraged to develop skills necessary for sustainable development through the continuing education programme. This will reduce the number of idle minds which are devil's workshop, and tackle the problem of insecurity.
4. The reorientation of existing continuing education should include principles, skills, perspectives and values of sustainable development.
5. The education and professional development of those who are responsible for implementing continuing education programme should be given top priority. Only qualified teachers should be involved in the implementation of continuing education programme.
6. There should be promotion of continuing education for knowledge, attitudes and skills for sustainable growth and human development by optimal investment in quality education in line with UNESCO's minimum standard of 26% annual budgetary allocation to education.
7. Facilities for effective teaching and learning should be provided in continuing education programme.

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