

Re-positioning the conceptual understanding of adult education for social transformation and good governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is on the re-positioning of the conceptual understanding of adult education for social transformation and good governance in Nigeria. Current changes and development have made this inevitable. Adult education as a lifelong learning equips the citizens in the society with desirable knowledge, skills, attitude and values capable of enabling them derive desirable benefits from the society and contribute more meaningfully towards developing and sustaining their environment. Unfortunately, the gross misleading and misinterpretations associated with the concept and discipline of adult education has affected the discipline negatively. There is, therefore urgent need to re-position the discipline of adult education in line with its global recognition of social transformation and good governance.

Keyword: Repositioning, Concept of Adult Education and Social transformation.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right to every citizen of any country. It is the key and driving force for meaningful development in the human society (Onyenemezu, 2012).

Education is also a parameter upon which individuals and national development could be measured.

Supporting the above, Anikpo and Atiemie in Egbezor and Okanezi (2008) view education as one of the social institutions that contributes significantly towards the

construction and maintenance of social order. The goal of any educational system is to provide or develop a balanced individual capable of surviving in his environment to which he/she belongs (Onyenemezu 2014). Corroborating the above, Olawale (2013) submits that education is a basic instrument for the survival of an individual and the society.

The significant posture education as a concept has earned in Nigeria has made it to be identified as a tool “par excellence” for effective national development (FRN) in Egbezor and Okanezi (2008). This development means economic growth which is measured through Gross National product (GNP), Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Per Capita Income (PCI). This national development stems from the degree of resourcefulness of the adult citizens both individually and collectively. This is true because adults are the ones occupying the production sector of the Nigerian economy.

The importance of education in Nigeria is enshrined in section 18 of the 1999 Constitution which spells out the educational objectives which are pursued no matter the circumstance. Part of the section states that government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy, and to achieve this government shall provide:

- a) Free, compulsory and Universal Primary Education
- b) Free University Education and
- c) Free Adult Literacy Programme

Since Nigerians independence in 1960, several National Development plans articulating the country’s development priorities and strategies in the area of education especially adult and non-formal education has been made. This is evidenced on the National Policy on Education which was adopted in 1977 and modified both in 1981, 1994 and 2004. The National policy on education provides for equal access to education, including adult and continuing education and promotion of Life-long learning.

The National Policy on education (2004) clearly states the objectives of Adult and Non-formal Education in Nigeria as follows:

- i. To provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education of (dropouts), including the nomads, migrant families, the disabled and the disadvantaged gender;
- ii. To provide functional and remedial education for those who did not complete secondary education.
- iii. To provide education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills;
- iv. To provide in-service, on the Job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills and
- v. To give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetics, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

Nigerian government and other development partners have made tremendous efforts towards achieving the above objectives but the country is still plagued with high rate of illiteracy, low productivity, poverty, unemployment, communal conflicts, kidnapping, armed robbery, health challenges/complications, etc. The people who are involved in such activities as indicated above are young adults who are school dropouts, unemployed, lack skills and education (Ugwu 2019). Adepoju (2005) states that lack of access to adult education programmes for many adults has truncated the progress of the country. Corroborating the above, Fasokun and Pwol (2010) assert that illiteracy continues to be a significant problem in Nigeria. Adult education is needed to change the socio-economic circumstances of these young adults and equip them with necessary non-formal skills that can make them self-reliant and independent. Adult education through its multifaceted programmes takes care of the learning needs and challenges of young adults and changes their attitude towards the desired direction. Eheazu quoted by Onyenemezu (2012), indicates that the strongest and desirable role adult education can and does play is in redressing injustice, deprivations and oppressions suffered by victims of pseudo-equalitarianism and insincerity of purpose in the provision made for the general good in education, training and functional learning.

The concept of adult education suffers low status in Nigeria. This accounts for a lot of misleading misconceptions and misinterpretations given to it. Adult education in Nigeria is seen as merely education for old people and stack illiterate adults who lack the opportunity of regular formal education in their childhood period. It is also seen as remedial programme for the dropouts from the regular formal school system. It is more of literacy education neglecting other programmes. In developed countries like United States of America, adult education is seen as workers education. World Bank (2019) argues that adult learning is an important channel to help readjust worker’s skills to fit in the future of work and suggest ways of improving its effectiveness. The low status of the concept of Adult Education is responsible for the lack of proper state control, non-achievement of its goals and objectives as enshrined in the National Policy on Education (2004), standardization and social vices seen in the country today. Tayo and Ewzie in Akubuilu, Okorie, Owuka and Uloh (2014), view that Adult and Non-formal education in Nigeria has been apparently the neglected aspect of educational activities in the country. This neglect is attributed to several factors which include funding, departure from missionaries and colonial rule that pioneered Adult education in order to achieve some social re-engineering of Nigerians then. Corroborating the above view, Nzeneri in Ugwu (2019) notes that Adult education has failed to achieve what it intends to achieve because of government neglect and methodology used by facilitators who are mostly volunteer workers who are not experts. The learning is centered on literacy alone which may not

address properly the needs of the learners. Egunomi in Akubio, Okorie, Owunka and Uloh (2014) observes that Adult education is being subsumed in Continuing Education which is a multi-dimensional discipline that covers the behavior of a man from the beginning of life to the end. Therefore, is therefore urgent need to re-position the conceptual understanding of Adult Education in Nigeria due to current charges and development in line with its global recognition of social transformation and good governance and the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDG'S).

The Concept of Adult Education

Adult education since inception as a worldwide programme has been defined in various ways by different scholars, practitioners and various organizations. These definitions depend on the prevailing circumstance and specific orientation of the various authors. Anyanwu in Imhabekhai (2009) views that the definitions of Adult education portray it as a response to educational needs of men and women. It tends to emphasize on the whole range of part-time educational provision for persons whose social and economic responsibilities give them adult status within their community. Mbalisi (2019) views that conditions which inform definition of Adult education in developing countries are different from the developed ones. This has led to the concept to be defined differently too. Kidd and Titmus in Mbalisi (2019) observed that variations in the definition of the concept of Adult education led to a very serious debate which lasted for several years which eventually generated a lot of confusion among adult educators, practitioners, policy makers and various organizations. Attempts at clearing the debate, confusions and variations in the definition of Adult education resulted to a globally acceptable definition to it as a concept. The first attempt to harmonize the definitions of Adult education was made in 1966 by the first International Congress on Comparative Study of Adult Education sponsored by UNESCO Okedara in Ihejirika (2012). According to the report of the conference, Adult Education denotes:

a process whereby persons who no longer attend school on a regular and full-time bases (unless full-time programs are especially designed for adults) undertake sequential and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, understanding or skills, appreciation and attitudes or for solving personal or community problems.

However, scholars from developing countries criticized the above definition which led to a search for a more acceptable definition of Adult Education. UNESCO, in its general conference held in Nairobi, Kenya on the 26th

November 1976 (ten years after the first definition) recommended thus:

adult education denotes the entire body of organized educational process, whatever the content, level and method, whether 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, or turn them into a new direction and brings about changes in their attitude or behavior in the two-fold perspective of full, personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development.

The above was not seen as a definition but a description of what Adult education should be. It was very complex to be comprehended and implemented. This definition also generated a lot of criticisms arising from its complexity and cumbersomeness irrespective of its merits when implemented. The criticisms led to a proposal for its modification during the fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) held in Hamburg Germany from July 14 to 18, 1997 which came up with a document known as Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning.

This document was subsequently endorsed and adopted in the sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) held in Belem, Brazil from December 1 to 4, 2009. This conference came up with a framework for action known as the Belem Framework for Action. These two documents namely, the Hamburg Declaration (1997) and Belem Framework (2009) proposed the definition of adult education as:

adult education denotes the entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise whereby people regarded as adults by the society they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society.

The 2014 and post 2015 International Debate on the definition of Adult education identified three strategies around which it is organized. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals (Ireland and Spezia in Mbalisi 2019).

The recommendation on the definition of adult education was finally modified by UNESCO's (2015) recommendation as:

adult education denotes the entire body of learning process, formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities, organizations and societies.

The above recommendation on adult learning and education was adopted at the 38th session of UNESCO'S General Conference held in Paris, France from 3-18 November, 2015. The recommendations supersedes all the previous recommendations by UNESCO and therefore is the current and comprehensive for researchers, practitioners, scholars, professionals of adult education, stakeholders, civil society, governmental and non-governmental organizations round the globe.

However, the 2015 recommendation on the definition of adult education was ratified by UNESCO in 2016, specifically for the purpose of monitoring success and progress in implementing Belem Framework for Action as follows:

adult Learning and Education (ALE) encompasses all formal non-formal and informal or accidental learning and continuing education (both general and vocational, and both theoretical and practical), undertaken by adults.

This definition involves sustained activities and processes of acquiring, recognizing, exchanging, and adapting capabilities (UNESCO, 2016). One peculiar thing about this definition is the inclusion into it of the concepts of learning and continuing education which is lifelong as its major components as contained in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.

Irrespective of the efforts by UNESCO to give a globally and concise definition to the concept of adult education, some authors and practitioners of adult education have given their different definitions based on their knowledge and circumstances they find themselves. For instance, Nzeneri (2012) defines adult education as education given to adults based on their social, political, cultural and economic needs or problems to enable them adjust fully to changes and challenges in their lives and society. Nyerere in Nzeneri (2010) defines adult education as something which is not only concerned with "agriculture" or "health" or "literacy" or "medical skill" but something more than these. He saw these as separate branches of education that are related to the total life of a man (an adult) and to the man he is and will become. According to him, adult education

embraces the entire life and its purpose is to improve on what is. Onyenemezu (2012) defines adult education as education (formal, informal and non-formal) given to any person regarded as an adult by his/her society in order to socially, economically, culturally and environmentally improve and empower himself/herself to be able to contribute meaningfully to the development of the society. It is education based on needs of the adult which proffers solutions to all human problems.

Scope of Adult Education

The scope of adult education is broad and complex as life with endless aims, purposes, activities and processes. Adult education as an integral part of lifelong education refers to a learning process whether formal, informal or non-formal engaged by adults for better development. It emphasizes all forms of functional education programmes for youths and adults outside the formal school system (Onyenemezu, 2012:7). Such education programmes include basic literacy programme, post literacy programme, continuing education, and vocational education programme (FRN Blue Print 2008). These adult education programmes are geared towards human (adult) development which in turn leads to national development. Nzeneri (2010) in Onyenemezu (2017) states that adult education in its ramifications, embraces all forms of formal, non-formal and informal adult education.

Formal Adult Education

Simply means any consciously planned and systematically organized educational programme which adults engage them in. Here, the adults register themselves, and follow specified syllabuses or courses on full-time or part time basis. This form of adult education takes place within the formal school setting.

Non-formal Adult Education

This form of adult education takes place outside the formal school setting. Sometimes this form of adult education is being referred to as "out-of- school adult education."

Informal Adult Education

This simply means incidental, accidental or unintentional learning which the adult person gain from day-to-day life experiences as they face changes and challenges in their lives.

The scope of adult education is as broad as life. Okafor in Nzeneri (2010:11) states that adult education involves the learning, reading and writing, primary and post-primary, university extension services, or extra-mural studies, and any other form of educational activity provided for the "adult" in order to complement or supplement formal education. Nyerere in Nzeneri (2010) views that adult education incorporates anything which enlarges men's

understanding, activates them, help them to make their own decisions, and implement those decisions for themselves. It includes “training, yet it is much more than training”. It includes organization and mobilization, and its purposefulness. Nzeneri (2010) states that the scope of adult education includes constitutional and trade union activities, awareness education liberal education, extension and mass education, aesthetic, moral and cultural education. Consequently, Freire in Onyenemezu (2017) observes that adult education as “conscientization” involves liberal adult education, extension adult education, and mass adult education, aesthetic education, moral and cultural adult education programmes.

Adult education through its programmes equips adults with literacy and basic skills, provides continuous training and professional development for the adults and promotes active citizenship. Fasokun in Onyenemezu (2012) observes that adult education is concerned not with preparing people for life but rather with assisting adults to live more successfully as useful and acceptable members of their societies and contribute meaningfully to the development of those societies. As a dynamic profession, adult education encompasses all aspects of life. It deals with human, material and societal problems which give the individual a feeling of joy and pride in the society. The programme is committed towards making the society a better living place. Ojo-Ajibare in Daramola (2015) observes that the development of human capital (skills, knowledge and attitude) through different programmes of adult education is critical to the overall development of the society.

Need to Re-position the Conceptual Understanding of Adult Education in Nigeria

To re-position the conceptual understanding of adult education simply means to put adult education in its proper global perspective of social transformation and good governance. In Nigeria adult education suffers from low status. The low status accorded adult education accounts for a lot of misnomer in its programmes. Adult education is seen as merely literacy programme for illiterate adults who lack the opportunity for regular education in their childhood years. It is also seen as remedial programme for those who drop out of the regular formal school system. The low status of adult education in Nigeria is responsible for its lack of proper placement; non-achievement of its goals and objectives is contained in the National Policy on Education (2004), lack of state control and its standardization. Therefore, adult education in Nigeria should be re-positioned to excessively launch the present adults into the orbit where they can respond to the challenges of the 21st century and make meaningful contributions to national development. This is so because adult education is pivotal to human development. The European Association for the Education of Adults (2019) recognizes the important role adult education can play in the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDG's). To them, adult education is

closely connected to economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development as it can enhance employment prospects, improve health and help grow active citizens. It also views that adult education is a driver in the interconnections of three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, and environment) and can contribute to the UN's 2030 agenda. There is need for education for sustainable development especially non-formal adult education and lifelong learning which has a very high impact in reducing poverty in Nigeria. Adult education has the capacity to positively affect many dimensions of poverty, peace or reconciliation as well as conflict management/prevention (EAEA, 2019).

Conclusion

The implications of the above discussion is that the conceptual understanding of adult education in Nigeria as education for the old people, stack illiterates who lack the opportunity of formal education in their childhood period and government's neglect of adult education have negatively affected the profession. Therefore there is urgent need to re-position the conceptual understanding of Adult Education for it to achieve its goals and objective good governance and the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDG'S) by the year 2030 in Nigeria.

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