

**INSIGHT INTO THE FORMS OF ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION
PROGRAMME AS AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIAN
DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY IN TERMS OF EQUITY AND POVERTY REDUCTION**

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ABSTRACT: *Though adult education has been identified and perceived for its complexities, the national policy on education in Nigeria and constitution ascribed its functionality to the country's democratic situation since independence. It democracy, a social mechanism for solving the problems of societal decision making among conflicting interest groups is tied to literacy, participation and education of the adults should be accorded a critical focus and situationally taken care of. This important factor in a democratic setting of Nigeria has not been given adequate attention like that of the youth. It is in the light of this, that this paper addresses the forms of adult literacy education programmes as agents of Nigerian transformational democracy in terms of equity and poverty reduction. The paper concludes that literacy education for the adults had undergone significant changes functionally in terms of felt needs, quality and control since independence. It also suggests that provision of enlightenment programmes should be addressed aggressively.*

KEYWORDS – Democratization, adult education, poverty, transformation and literacy.

INTRODUCTION

Adult education is now widely recognised as an important aspect of citizenship in any democratized nation like Nigeria due to the roles played by its various forms in the national development of the society. It is a vital aspect of Nigerian National Policy on Education that views it as a medium of generating qualities of good citizenship and involving all (actively) in the national development process.

The Concept of Adult Education

‘Adult Education’ is very difficult to define due to its nature, target or recipient and promoter. The concept of which the adult learners are, also vary from place-to-place and in the diverse perceptions of different scholars. Okenwa and Oni (1992) viewed adult learners as individuals considered at four levels, viz:

- I. Legal consideration – Attainment of the age 21 years (regarded as age of puberty) when he becomes accountable for whatever actions of decision he takes. At that age, he could be arraigned before any court of law is suspected or found guilty of any

offence. These scholars believe that anybody at that age cannot claim to be ignorant or immature.

- II. Biological/Physiological Consideration – Here the outward appearance in terms of height or posture is considered an adult. Here age is not considered as the primary determinant of who an adult is. The contraction here is that a boy or girl of age 15 (fifteen) may appear gigantic physiologically. It may not be easy for the education of such individual to attain the objectives of adult education which has its peculiarities.
- III. Societal Consideration – This makes the determining factors of who an adult is, to vary from one community to another. An individual who gets married, irrespective of age or sex automatically becomes an adult in some communities. In some communities, however, age grade is the criterion for adulthood. He is hence considered an adult even if not married.
- IV. Political Consideration – Some scholars believe that political policies may determine adulthood in some countries. For instance, one cannot vote nor be voted for if he is not up to 18years of age.

This paper actually recognizes the criteria used by Okenwa and Oni (1992) in describing adulthood. Though Omolewa (1985) asserts that most writers seem to agree that adult education is the education geared to the adult; he raises the question of who an adult is and defined it as the education provided for all men and women who are aged 21 and above. This is a biological definition that forgets that 18 years is considered an adult in some countries for the purposes of election and other responsibilities. Tugbiyele (1970) however neither refers to chronological or biological age in his conception of adult in attempt to expose him to organized educational activities. He adopts a social conception of adulthood. He uses two criteria in the nature of adulthood:

- I. From the individual's point of view, adulthood means independence, for example marriage and financial self support.
- II. From society's point of view, adulthood implies acceptance of social responsibility – the individual's ability to assume adult roles, for example, the family roles of husband and wife and father and mother, and the work role of being a full-time worker.

The first criterion of Tugbiyele on the concept of adulthood indicates that the adult learner has a full-time job, has his own family and financially independent to decide on the form of education that suits his social status. The second criterion of Tugbiyele is of the strong view that adult education is a part time education. He knows his social responsibility as a father and the need to acquire additional knowledge on some other areas so as to stabilize his role or status. It should be noted that retraining of personnel on the job can be full time programme in adult education because Tugbiyele focuses on independent adult learner with identified social responsibility.

Adetuyi (2003) contends that

'Adult education seeks to redress the imbalance of education received during childhood and youth'

Adetuyi here considers the earlier education as inadequate to prepare the individual for the later period of life professionally and culturally. He is of the opinion that any set of instructions given to the adult would constitute adult education (taking into consideration all or some of the determinants of adulthood). (Adult Education), in the widest sense, any kind of education for people who are old enough to work, vote, fight and marry and who have completed the cycle of continuous education commenced in childhood.

This definition appears functional because people who are old enough to work and have completed the cycle of continuous education from childhood would embark on adult education programmes to pass examinations, to learn basic skills of trades or professions or to learn new working process. They may even want to understand themselves and their world better.

The various definitions are not rigid on age limitation but problem –solving. They focus on education of people outside the schools systems but still have the plan of acquiring knowledge. Drop-out is taken care of by the definitions. Such programme –based definition of adult education can be summarized as:

- I. Adult education defined as adult literacy education
- II. Adult education as the education which embraces all forms of education provided for working men and women, housewives and others, who for one reason or the other are willing to improve the quality of their education
- III. Adult education described as University extension or extra-mural work
- IV. Adult education as fundamental education (acquisition of reading and writing) and concerned with agricultural extension, community development and social welfare.
- V. Adult education as a sort of remedial education, a continuing education, up-dating the education already acquired by the adult
- VI. Adult Education defined as vocational or industrial education, the education which encourages the use of 3h (the head, the hand, and the heart).

On the objectives of adult education, Nigerian National Policy on Education has this in its section 52:

- I. The provision of functional literacy education for adults who have never had the advantage of any formal education.
- II. The provision of functional and remedial education for those young people who prematurely dropped out of the formal school system.
- III. The provision of further education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills.

- IV. The provision of in-service, on the job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills and
- V. The provision to adult citizens of the country of necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education of public enlightenment.

Since an examination of the concept of adult education has revealed diversity in scholars' perception of the rationale, goals and aims of the forms of the programme, this paper finds it vital to examine the forms so as to determine how they can transform Nigerian democratic society positively.

It is only by establishing effective communication with the adult population by helping them to adjust to a rapidly changing world that an immediate impact can be made on the urgent problems of society and essential progress be brought about. It is therefore necessary to check the deficiencies of our adult by providing functional adult education which will make them suitable in the complex democratic society of today.

Having identified adults as necessary actors in Nigerian democratic society, the illiterate ones must be exposed to literacy programmes (an integral aspect of adult education). As Osuagwu (1986: 7) has argued quoting the Director General A.M.M. Bow of the UNESCO, Democracy is a sham if there are masses of illiterates all over the country. This is because a literate and well informed citizenry is the bedrock on which an enlightened society is built.

Democratization and Adult Education

Instead of increasing the participatory role of an adult, the bureaucratic forces and other trends in modern society have restricted the rights of an adult in the democratic setting. Moreover, the open society has given place to an elitist one. Instead of a free and equal democratic people, we now have an elitist unequal and stratified society.

Despite the development-oriented aims and objectives of the country, little effort has been made in the aspects of adult education programmes in Nigeria. The concept of democratization has been perceived by Osuji (2001) as characterized by 'waves' and 'reverse waves'. The current wave (which has been so strong) has resulted in initiation of democratic transformation process by different regimes in Nigeria such as those Osuji described as 'militarist autocratic' and 'sit-tight'. The democratization process has only achieved a slow or zero progress due to poverty. Political education has been suggested as the only tool that can be used as facilitative and enhancing tool in the democratic transformation process. Democracy entails people's participation in governance as well as freedom of choice.

The success of democratization process depends on the people. It creates institutions that operate to ensure governance that leads to the realization of a civil society, equality, justice, fair play etc.

Poverty can hinder an individual's participation in societal development in a democratized setting. Poverty has been described by UNDP (1996) as '*a multi-dimension phenomenon characterized by deprivation of entitlement through lack of access to economic resources, social resources, political participation and consultants*'. There are absolute poverty and relative poverty. In absolute poverty, the individual is not able to obtain the basis needs of life (food, cash and shelter). Relative poverty refers to a situation where an individual is deprived of thriving like poverty, land, income etc which others take for granted.

The interplay of democracy, democratization and poverty reveals that the people afflicted by poverty will perceive themselves as powerless and helpless in the political process hence assuming a passive observance and role. They are often ignorant of their rights talk less of their entitlement as citizens. This implies that adults can only contribute to the societal growth if empowered and motivated through various forms of programmes appropriate for their status.

Forms of Adult Education Programmes in Nigeria

Since adult education programmes have been recognized as integral part of lifelong education that can contribute to the economic and cultural development, social progress and the developments of the educational systems, there is the need to have an overview of the various forms. It has, no doubt, extended elementary schooling to the masses and based on nationally identified needs. With the various definitions advanced by various scholars, some criteria can actually be ascribed to ideal adult education programmes.

They include:

1. Such programme must be educational in nature;
2. It must be relatively organized and planned;
3. It must be a deliberate activity directed towards the felt needs and interests of recipients;
4. Its target clients must be adult with social responsibility;
5. It must be characterized by the voluntary participation of the adult;
6. It must be learner-centred, needs-oriented, and organized out-of-school;
7. It must deal with matters of immediate concern.

It is as a result of the multiplicity of adult education programmes that Akinpelu (2002) considers the following programmes as bona fide adult education programmes:

- ✓ Literacy education (literacy skills for adults and out-of-school kids)
- ✓ Continuing education (evening schools, extra-mural classes etc)
- ✓ Civic education
- ✓ Community development
- ✓ Rural development or rural transformation

- ✓ Agricultural extension education
- ✓ Health extension education
- ✓ Mass education
- ✓ Population education (or family planning education)
- ✓ Workers education
- ✓ Nomadic and migrant education
- ✓ Social welfare and social work
- ✓ Environmental education
- ✓ Consumer education
- ✓ Prisoners welfare education and rehabilitation
- ✓ Women education
- ✓ Educational gerontology or geriatrics education
- ✓ Peace education/international education
- ✓ Distance education (including correspondence education)
- ✓ Political education and political action programmes
- ✓ Vocational education (full-time and part-time)
- ✓ Continuing professional educational
- ✓ Cultural, aesthetic and recreational
- ✓ Industrial and labour education
- ✓ Public enlightenment)or mass mobilization) (P.17-18)

Though there have been criticisms on the classification of the programmes by adult education scholars that some of them are recreational, mere social services or political action, they are all situational relevant and need –meeting. Each attempts a solution to a problem and educational in nature. Workers’ education for instance is a sort of remedial and continuing education upgrading the education already acquired by adult of working class. The ‘drop-outs’ are encouraged to ‘drop-in’ and develop their potentials. Omolewa (1985) quoted.

Arthur Lewis who contends that:

The quickest way to increase productivity in the less developed countries is to train the adults who are already on the job

Workers’ education will no doubt contribute to the transformation of the democratic society in terms of poverty reduction and education for all. In the prisoners’ welfare, education rehabilitation, the result oriented reformation of the clientele (prisoners) is attained and make have the opportunity of being trained for a future career that can make them self-reliant and responsible. They are given political education, health education, moral education and vocational.

As entrenched in Nigerian philosophy of education as what should be for all, adult education programmes can create awareness in all citizens in its lifelong concept. It will offer another chance for whoever dropped out of his educational opportunity to drop in. This could be

through remedial education to correct the deficiency he has had some time. It could also be for adults who want to start their education afresh. It is the deficiency of the adults who want that will determine the appropriate type of adult education to be received. As False (2000) rightly observed, the best that adult education can do is to help in reducing inequalities.

He also quoted Omolewa (1981) as saying that:

'Adult education is supported to help those who have dropped out of school to 'equalize' their education through remedial education or continuing education which seeks to update the education already acquired by the adult'

For the beginners, acquisition of the skills of reading and unity will constitute their education. They need to possess the ability to read some expressions like 'one way', 'No smoking', 'No crossing', etc in the cities so as to fit into the societal system (i.e. Adult literacy programmes)

With the above as a premise for argument, some missionaries gave priority to adult teaching. Sunday Sabbath schools and weekly evening classes were organized for the literacy programme so as to change the society (then). The intention of the missionaries at that time was not really to attain any fair play nor education for all; it was for their selfish interest. In fact, the society was not democratic in nature because the nation was still under the colonialists. African chiefs only wanted the missionary education for their wards so as to have trade advantage and to bring themselves and the wards up to fit into the family settings and states. They were not exposed to arts and vocational skills expected by the African chiefs until the middle of the 19th century in the area of medicine and printing works.

1962 Teheran Accord, under the auspices of UNESCO however revived government's interest in adult literacy in 1965. Functional literacy programmes were carried out at various experimental sites for the tobacco farmers in Oyo North and the Ewekoro Cement Factory in Nigeria.

The country's mass literacy campaign of 1982 is a laudable step at eradicating illiteracy and transforming the society in form of education for all, equity and poverty reduction. Though deficiencies were observed in the programme, there is no doubt that it has contributed its own quota to the transformation of the society positively.

Those on the job can also attain worker's education through continuing educational programmes. Akintayo et al described continuing education as having '*.... a professional component, whereby education is provided for adults for occupational updating and improvement*'. It is the programme provided to the adult after his full time programme by institutions, organization or business houses. The adults are therefore given the opportunity to improve on the job with courses relevant to the labour demand. Workers and owners of non-

farm enterprises and even unemployed educated adult can enjoy training for small entrepreneurship and management at vocational centres in Nigeria.

The provisions imply a continuous improvement of knowledge and skill an individual might have acquired. Egunyomi (2001) then identifies the following as continuing education programmes: extra-mural, correspondence education, independent study, external studies or extension programmes. It shows that the programmes of continuing education ensure education for all categories of people, fair play and means of poverty reduction that characterized a democratic nation like Nigeria. A worker can embark on independent study for professional examinations in ACCA, ICSA, and NIM courses e.t.c

Extra-mural education and evening school programme constitute another brand of adult education which seeks to organize programmes graduated over primary, secondary and post secondary stages. The programmes lead to the award of certificates to mature students later used to gain better employment or promotion in the job Extra-mural programmes of the adult education department of university of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and the evening school programme in law and business administration of university of Lagos are examples. External Degree studies of the university of Ibadan, Distance Learning programme of university of Lagos, and part –time degree courses in education at University of Jos, University of Benin, Sandwich programmes of the various colleges of education and polytechnic and the National Teachers' Institute programmes are all efforts at providing adult education so as to reduce poverty, inequality and injustice in Nigeria. It should be noted that adult education is used to create self-awareness in an adult and a self reliant individual. This is an evidence of equalization of opportunities.

The education is supposed to open the eyes of the learner, and the skill the learner acquires is secondary to the primary purpose of consciousness – rising. (Falase 2000) The adult is now aware of his legal rights and the need to question the status quo. He is liberated through adult education programmes.

Adult education in its form is also a good illustration of an attempt at transforming the society to reduce poverty and inequality as in apprenticeship system (Adetuyi 2004) Vocational skills in Agriculture and Industry are acquired in most traditional societies of Nigeria and some of these programmes still characterize the present democratic setting. Young boys and girls were then apprenticed to master craftsmen for a pre-determined numbers of years. They lived with their masters and helped in domestic duties. The male learners were trained in vocations like healing, carving, priesthood, trading, farming, smiting and hunting. Even now, they learn driving, barbing, painting, carpentry, mechanic, textile, electrical fittings.

The female folk also learn knitting, weaving, tailoring, tie and dye, photography, textile, art of buying and selling and hairdressing. Omolewa (1981) on African informal education says:

....the attitude and practice of regarding those who do not go to the formal school and can therefore neither read nor write, or possess a set of the theoretical knowledge from school or college as uneducated is unscientific, irrational misleading and should be discouraged.

Apart from being part of African heritage, it makes the learners (adult inclusive) self reliant or gainful employed. He will be able to meet his financial obligation in the society and also free financially. As pointed out by Fajana, one of the aims of this traditional information education is to instil discipline in all the faculties of life of the individual to bring out the qualities in him and to help him at different stages to become a useful member of the society.

It should be noted however that despite the good side of the traditional informal education, lack of documentation and literacy has made it difficult to put the adult on the upper ladder of the democratic society in term of active participation. The disciplinary feature of the system however makes it uneasy for the adult to stand against the rights of his fellow citizen. He is well behaved and well spoken of. He is also familiar with the cultural practices of his society.

The Nigerian Open University borrowed from the example of the Britain is another attempt at bringing education to the door-steps of the masses or neglected Nigerians. These sets of people could not further their education on full time due to social, financial, family and occupational reasons. In year 2002, the system was formally introduced with the adoption of distance teaching methods. The radio, television and mailed tuition course will constitute teaching media. Facilitators have also been appointed at the Local Government levels to provide face-to-face teaching as supplement to the existing educators' delivery. The Federal Government designed the system to disseminate knowledge to the mature, working adults, housewives and even artisans or any individual who missed out on their education. It is also an opportunity for higher education. The Open University is another opportunity of ensuring education for all, equity, justice and fair play. Poverty will definitely reduce when majority is exposed to learning. There will be job opportunities and many will be self-reliant.

Women Education

Akintayo and Akintayo (2000) submitted that.... We must reconsider women's roles in the larger social, educational and economic order so that as women become more literate, they have opportunities to use those skills in ways that are personally meaningful, socially relevant and economically rewarding. They went further to say that:

'...the percentage of illiterate women has increased in the post independence period, the absolute number of non-literate have also increased...'

Women can also constitute the agent of change or transformation of Nigerian democratic society if exposed to rapid adult education programmes. Even in 1985, Nigerian government made it mandatory that more non-formal establishments be created to cater for the education of our illiterate women on who plays the burden of the stability of the home and society.

This indicates that women are also powerful agent of change as mothers and home makers. They enjoy equity and fair play through the adult education opportunities. As pointed by Anyanwu (2002), nomadic populations have contributed in no small measure to community and national development in Nigeria through their valuable economic services. He also revealed that the mobile pastoralists, migrant fishermen and farmers can be found in about 25 states of the federation, hence the need to examine the role played by nomadic group vis-a-vis the challenge of nomadic education in Nigerian democratic society. Since these people are mainly mature adults with aspirations, they also have right to education of their status. In Anyanwu's Research Report, their urgent educational needs were recorded as:

- i. Basic literacy and numeracy
- ii. Introduction to modern techniques of animal husbandry
- iii. Modern techniques of processing dairy products
- iv. Simple book keeping
- v. Cooperative organization and management
- vi. Improved housing
- vii. Health education and
- viii. Civic and moral education

He therefore suggest the introduction of extension services in nomadic education programmes which will be essentially an agricultural extension activity involving the teaching of learners in a voluntary out-of-school situation. This will go long way to improve their methods and techniques, increase their production efficiency and income. It will also improve their standard of living.

Adult vocational education, it could be recalled, performed a great role in our nation's economic recovery and self-reliance during our transition to civil rule when there was high rate unemployment and other social ills. Several programmes like the national directorate of employment (NDE), better life for rural women, mass mobilization for social and economic recovery (MAMSER), national notation agency structural adjustment programme (SAP) and the people's bank of Nigeria (PBN) were introduced not only to educate workers but to let them know their rights and responsibilities to the society

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It is no gain saying that adult education in the last 55 years of its history has undergone significant changes in terms of felt needs, quality and control as well as motivation.

Functional literacy, extension and post – literacy educational programmes based on national and individual needs have been incorporated.

Development and change in their totality have been taken to the rural area with the utilization of education as change agent. Education and training of adults through laudable programmes and community development programmes have been taken as joint responsibility of both the government and the masses. Attention has been focused on job vocational skills, home industry and improvement skills.

If adult education programmes will achieve their set objectives in terms of fair play, justice, education for all and equity in Nigeria democratic society, the following issues should be addressed.

- 1 The masses should be empowered to determine their own orientation and self-conscious for their own relationship with the objective reality of their existence.
- 2 People should be induced to think of changing them around them for better through self participation in development programmes.
- 3 The nation's wealth should be redistributed between the dominants, the minority rich and dominated, majority poor such that they can improve their standard of living and develop their own potentials.
- 4 Democratization of access to functional literacy and non-formal education programmes for their social, economic, and political update.
- 5 Development of self confidence and spirit of self-reliance in the people's capabilities.
- 6 Provision of enlightenment programmes to liberate and raise the level of cultural, social and political consciousness of the people.
- 7 Empowerment of the people through power sharing with the grassroots.
- 8 Giving priorities to adult education programmes by the government through adequate fund and organization.

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