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Adult Education in Nigeria: A Discipline in Search of Scope and Direction?

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Abstract

Adult education as a field of study is indispensable in national development as its relevance cuts across all sectors. Having suffered much neglect and accorded low priority by governments in the pre and post independence era in Nigeria, the developmental potentials of the discipline was unexplored and it remained marginalized in the curricula of most tertiary institutions. The functional nature of Africans traditional system of education which has inbuilt adult education learning strategies equipped people with knowledge and skills that enabled them live and cope with challenges within their environment. As society became more complex with its increasing socio-economic problems that are currently ravaging most developing nations, more emphasis is still placed on formal system of education with little attention on non-formal education and particularly adult education as a discipline. This discipline that is not popularly subscribed for in our tertiary institutions and that has not yet been adequately utilized in developmental circles has the potentials to significantly help equip people with necessary knowledge and skills to minimize the many socio-economic problems in our society. Be that as it may, the current challenges of globalization, the many socio-economic and political crises bedeviling our nation demands that its scope and curricula be restructured to respond to the changing needs of national development. Based on the above, this paper evaluates the current state of the discipline in Nigeria.

Keywords: key words, Adult education, scope of adult education, adult education curriculum, adult education discipline.

1. Introduction

Most developing countries of the world inherited a negative attitude towards adult education from former colonial powers (Fasokun, 2000). The low status accorded adult and non-formal education then was as a result of the prevailing circumstances of focusing attention on the formal system of education. Consequently, in Nigeria for example, the field suffered neglect and remained largely under-explored, and its products were underutilized for national development. However, in the post-independence period, its relevance was recognized mainly for literacy purposes. This narrow conception of the field unduly influenced official thinking towards supporting only adult literacy programmes to the detriment of other important aspects of the discipline. It is not surprising therefore that as Seya (2005) pointed out, the popularity of adult education in Africa started eroding in the early 80's concomitantly with the rise of formal basic education.

Adult education is yet to be fully appreciated as a discipline relevant for socio-economic development of Nigeria given the level of its development at the tertiary level of our educational institutions. In Nigeria, the adult education training programmes offered in the various universities led to the general lack of understanding of the actual scope of the discipline and its role in national development. This lack of appreciation of scope was further strengthened by the fact that the background of a sizable number of lecturers in the discipline were from other disciplines. In fact, some of these lecturers dominated the discipline to an extent and even influenced its curriculum contents and direction over the years. The result was that various departments had diverse curricula offered at different levels in our universities. The problem was even more compounded by the fact that the graduates of the discipline in some universities were neither trained for the classroom nor for a specific professional field of practice except for areas that also overlapped with other disciplines such as community development, extension services, health services among others. The matter was made worse when those who were even trained in the area of literacy were hardly employed in agencies responsible for mass and adult literacy.

It is against this background that this paper evaluates the current state of adult education discipline in Nigeria within the context of its scope and future direction. It examines issues such as the scope and relevance of adult education, and its professional training and status. It then evaluates the curricula of adult education in Nigerian universities in the context of prevailing socio-political and economic challenges in Nigeria.

2. The Scope and Relevance of Adult Education

Adult education is understood as a transmission process of general, technical or vocational knowledge, as well as skills, values and attitudes which takes place out of the formal education system with a view to remedying early inadequacies of mature people or equipping them with the knowledge and cultural elements required for their self-fulfillment and active participation in the social, economic and political life of their societies (Seya 2005).

UNESCO (1976) defines adult education "as the entire body of organized process whatever the content, level or method, formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, college 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 behavior in the two fold perspectives of full personal development".

In most developing countries, adult educators are found in very many organizations from public to private. They carry out diverse activities similar to the diverse organizations they work in. They seek to meet the needs, interests and values of varying groups in the society. However, irrespective of their organizations and the duties they perform, their work is usually driven by the theories and practices of development. According to Ouane (2009) adult learning and education is now more than ever emerging as an empowering tool capable of liberating and harnessing the creative forces of people, the potential of communities and the wealth of nations in a situation of global crisis.

Over the years, scholars and practitioners at both national and international levels have had intense debates on issues relating to adult education as a field of study and practice. (Mera 2004). These were aimed at finding a more coherent agenda for adult and non-formal education and to formulate dynamic policies that would transform adult education practice of many developing countries for as Mera (2004) observed in most countries, adult education is not a relevant part of most public policy. Indeed it is yet to be a priority. In many cases, from the perspective of government policy, adult education continues to be poor education for poor people, an education reduced to temporary efforts at literacy.

Seen in a lifelong learning context, it is an inclusive education that emphasizes self-esteem, empowerment, citizenship-building, community organization, labor skills, income generations and even poverty alleviation. Nigeria and indeed many African countries are currently faced with daunting challenges of reducing unemployment, eradicating poverty, poor health conditions, preventing and resolving conflicts, insecurity and integrating smoothly into the mainstream of the world economy (Seya 2005). They are also grappling with the relentless surge of HIV/AIDS and the fast technological advancement. The inevitability of utilizing adult and non-formal education in addressing these challenges becomes imperative.

Adult education is not only relevant in the economic and social spheres. It plays a very significant contribution in strengthening democracy. According to Seya (2005), for democracy to be achieved, adult education is needed to educate citizens on the democratic culture as well as inform them of their rights and responsibilities as democracy also requires people to actively participate at local, national and global levels. Again, we are in a global society and globalization as a concept is associated with diverse meanings. To Giddens (1990), globalization is "the intensification of worldwide social relations which links distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa". It has its intended and unintended consequences. According to Garuba (n.d), the unintended consequences are of different dimensions but no one presents greater threats to global peace and stability than the present upsurge of international terrorism. Meeting the challenges of globalization or containing the effects of its unintended consequences would require an informed, literate and active citizenry and this can only happen by making adult learning and education the focus of policy and action as a transversal agenda that cross-cuts policy domains and resource allocations" (Ouane 2009). However one of the major challenges in this field in Nigeria is the widening gap between policy provision and implementation. Though adult educators and practitioners occupy the professional position to participate effectively in mitigating the challenges of the emerging global society that hinder development efforts, the critical question that needs to be asked is are they well prepared currently for this? This takes us to the next issue of professional preparation of adult educators.

2.1. Adult Educators and Professional Development

Adult education as a multidisciplinary field overlaps with many subject areas. It includes basic and continuing education, vocational and technical education, higher education and professional development, it is offered through formal, non-formal and informal means and by a variety of actors. These actors have different backgrounds and operate from different conception of what the purpose of adult education is. This however makes it a bit complex in trying to define the profession and thereby creating the crisis of professional development in the world of work. Sava (n.d) argued that not only the different roles to be performed in different ways, but the disparate practices in different sectors of adult education, different educational and professional biographies and employment statutes, dynamic competency profiles make the definition of the profession of adult educators very difficult. He further pointed out that the spectrum of adult education staff is extremely broad given the integration of adult education in all societal sectors which makes it a borderless discipline. Special knowledge and skills are needed to carry out job as professionals in specific fields. In addition, group must belong to a professional body and enjoy a level of respect from the general public. This is yet to be said of adult educators in most developing countries. According to Jutte, *et al* (2011) the field remains largely not regulated because it is yet to acquire other requirements such as: having a clear monopoly on the occupation; definite entry requirement; specific professional association to maintain code of conduct and common core of competencies.

As a discipline, adult education is yet to gain full professional status such as medicine, law, engineering etc. Learning societies of today, need lifelong learning. For the building of the "knowledge society" of the 21st century and the actualization of a future for adult education in Nigeria, the professional development of adult educators is a critical component in this respect.

Training of adult educators at the university levels perhaps focuses more on the content than on the practical aspects. Okech (2006) pointed out that most universities in Africa offering adult education programmes emphasize the academic discipline at the cost of practice and that the practical component is usually inadequately financed. He therefore argued for the need to balance theory and practice. Expressing his views on the roles of university adult and continuing education in promoting mass literacy campaigns in Nigeria, Oduaran (1986) made the point that Universities have done very well in the aspect of research, manpower and development, advocacy and materials development. However, with respect to personnel development Oduaran (2000) argued that it would have been preferred to indicate what the universities are doing with respect to professional programme in the field.

On the issue of job opportunities for adult educators, Youngman (2005) wondered how the training of adult educators on both academic and non-academic levels could be related to the needs of the labour market, so that job opportunities may be created for adult educators. This argument no doubt has a bearing on the knowledge content acquired by the adult educator during training which invariably points to the curriculum. Youngman (2000a) had however affirmed that the availability of competent personnel to develop, organize, promote, teach and evaluate modes of learning for adults is an indispensable condition for the successful implementation of adult education policies and programmes. The training of adult educators he argued should therefore be an important component of discussion on the future of adult education. Curriculum has to do with the totality of the process of education within the entire course of study, learning and other related theme (Shilbeck, 1976, and Anwukah,2000). Curriculum is basically connected to the entire educational system. It encompasses programme of studies, programme of activities and programme of guidance. Thus, curriculum as a concept can be defined from different perspectives by different scholars while retaining the key issue.

On the other hand, curriculum development is a unique education activity which faces the challenges of defining dynamic objectives, selecting appropriate learning experiences or content and organizing and integrating these contents which must be of positive value for national development (Nwagbara 2012). Curriculum development is a continuous process aimed at ensuring the continued relevance and responsiveness of the curriculum to societal needs. It is a reform aimed at infusing change in the entire educative process. Moreno (2006) states that educational reform all over the world is increasingly curriculum-based as mounting pressures and demands for change tend to target and focus on both the structures and the very content of school curricula. This is so because life and society itself is dynamic.

For Bhola (2000), the challenge of adult education is to create a vibrant professionalized sector of adult education without devaluing and weakening the character and content of the indigenous culture of adult education. In similar view, Garuba (n.d) argued that Nigerian adult educators need to be more equipped to practice in modern day globalization, and that the starting point of personnel preparation and training in adult and lifelong learning will have to be the restructuring of curriculum of adult education institutions. At the International level, UNESCO has played significant role in the development of Adult Education and Adult Educators. Among the many International conferences held, UNESCO's Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINITEA V) held in Hamburg in 1997 espoused the vision for improving the conditions for the professional development of adult educators and facilitators. In his view, Youngman (2000a) identified the essential proficiencies which all adult educators require if the vision espoused by CONFINITEA V was to be realized in the everyday world of adult education practice. These generic proficiencies include areas of knowledge such as adult learning and social issues, areas of skills such as participatory methodologies and applied information technology, and areas of attitude such as commitment to the values of social justice and to working in cross-sectoral partnerships. Hence the key dimensions of CONFINITEA V, provide a basis for developing the curricula of training for adult educators. For Youngman (2000b), curriculum investigation can reveal how conscious and unconscious choices affecting the content and processes of adult education reflect the structures of inequality in the wider society. In the context of this paper, do adult education curricula in Nigerian Universities reflect the current needs of the time with respect to issues such as globalization, information and communications technology (ICT), security, poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation among others? The next section focuses on this question.

3. Evaluation of Adult Education Curricula in Selected Nigerian Universities

3.1 Methodological Issues

This paper is a study in documentary research design. It evaluates existing documents (ie adult education curricula at the undergraduate level) in selected federal universities. It focuses on federal universities because it was in them that adult education started in this country and then spread to state-owned universities. The long

existence of the discipline in federal universities provides a better context for our discussion in this paper. Presently, there are 37 federal universities and after an environmental scanning of the existence of adult education programme, it was found out that 13 of them (with some degree of certainty) are running the programme. Consequently, 6 of them were purposively selected for evaluation reflecting a mixture of first and second generation universities as well as North-South geographical representation. The restriction to six universities was largely determined by the wed-presence of the curricula as well as success of efforts by the researcher to get the curricula through colleagues contacted in these universities. The first generation universities selected are University of Ibadan (UI), University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), and University of Benin (UNIBEN). The second generation universities are Bayero University Kano (BUK), Usman Danfodio University Sokoto (UDUS), and University of Maiduguri (UNIMAID).

With respect to analysis, a content analysis method was adopted. The choice of content analyzed was based on major thematic areas of adult education programme as reflected in the National Minimum Standards of the National Universities Commission (NUC). These are (i) functional literacy, (ii) ICT, (iii) women education, Industrial/Labour education, (iv) administration, (v) Community development, (vi) cooperative management, (vii) teaching subjects, and (viii) environmental education. Suffice it to mention that some relevant courses/themes are already covered by the General Studies programmes of these universities hence they were not looked for in the contents evaluated. Some of these courses are entrepreneur education, peace and conflict resolution. The criteria of evaluation adopted was a likert-type response pattern of (i) very adequate (VA), (ii) adequate (A), (iii) moderately adequate (MA), and not adequate (NA).

3.2 Evaluation and Discussion

Table 1: Extent of Reflection of Relevant Courses in Adult Education Undergraduate Programme

University	Literacy	ICT	W/Edu	I & L Studies	Admin	C/Dev	Coop Magt	T/Subjects	Environmental Edu
UNN	A	NA	A	MA	VA	VA	NA	A	NA
BUK	A	NA	NA	A	MA	A	NA	A	NA
UNIBEN	A	NA	A	VA	A	VA	NA	A	VA
UNIMAID	A	NA	NA	NA	NA	A	NA	A	NA
UDUS	A	NA	A	NA	A	A	NA	A	A
UI	MA	NA	NA	VA	VA	VA	NA	A	NA

Source: Analyzed by the Author

The table reveals that out of the six federal universities evaluated, functional literacy and teaching subjects are adequately reflected except in UI where it is moderately reflected. Community development and administration were very adequately reflected in UNN and UI while they were just adequate in UDUS, BUK. At UNIBEN, administration is moderately reflected while community development is very adequate. It was only at UNIMAID that administration is not adequate. Women education and industrial/labour studies however did not have a satisfactory reflection except in UNIBEN and UI where industrial/labour studies were very adequately reflected. ICT, Environmental education and Cooperative management are the casualties in all the universities. Comparatively speaking, University of Benin appears to be ahead of others in reflecting adequately majority of the courses in the key thematic areas evaluated.

Given the present socio-economic and political challenges confronting Nigeria, adult education programme should have adequate representation of ICT-based, and environmental education courses. This will adequately equip adult educators to confront developmental challenges facing the nation. As Marcos et al (2011) observed the demand for environmental education in adult and youth education is imperative. They argued that various texts and authors acknowledge the need to include environmental issues and environmental education in adult and youth training programmes. Similarly, Nzewi (2012) rightly pointed out that climate change, conflict, environmental degradation, poverty, ICT, population growth are some of the emerging global issues that should shape the education curricula.

4. Conclusion

Adult education as a discipline in Nigeria needs a new direction that reflects the prevailing developmental needs of the society. More importantly, the training of professional adult educators at institutions of higher learning must be in tandem with the prevailing global trends. This demands that NNCAE makes concerted efforts to raise the professional status of this important discipline by reflecting some currently neglected courses that have the capability to enhance its relevance to the society.

Nigerian government and the National Universities Commission which is the regulatory organ of universities should ensure that adult education as a field of study is encouraged by managers of institutions of higher learning by establishing adult education departments, admitting students and ensuring accreditation of courses in these departments.

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