

Prospects of Adult Education as a Programme of Study in Three Selected Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

Adult Education as a programme of study refers to any educational programme(s) developed by a tertiary institution and organized as an academic plan to move beneficiaries towards a career path in helping adults to learn. The paper set to examine the prospects of adult education as a programme of study in Three selected Nigerian Universities namely; Rivers State University, University of Ibadan and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The paper also observed some of the prospects of having Adult Education as a programme of study, as increase in the nation's income, production of skilled manpower, increase in literacy rate of the people, reduction in maternal and infant mortality rates, more skills and expertise will be ensured amongst others. Finally, some of the suggestions made amongst others were; increase in funding, proper fresher's orientation on campuses, societal appreciation of the need for the course, and proper sensitization of the target group.

Keywords: Adult education, adult literacy and andragogy.

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Introduction

Adult education is a concept widely misunderstood within the Nigerian populace. This may be due to the fact that the two words which make up the concept are stereotyped words with literal meanings everyone is familiar with. However, Adult education goes beyond just teaching adults alphabets, to varied richly packaged exercises for the adult populace. Adult education has been defined by various writers and researchers in different perspectives. However, UNESCO in her international Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, (1976) as reported in Onyenemezu (2012, p.53) defined adult education as:

The entire body of organized education 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 attitudes or behaviour in the two fold perspectives of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development. (p.53)

The above definition is broad and encompassing because it does not only define adult education but it also defines its content and scope. Olajide (2003) defines adult education as the education (formal, informal and non-formal) given to any person regarded as an adult by society in other to socially, economically, and culturally improve and empower him/her so that the person will be able to contribute meaningfully as a useful and responsible member of society. It is education based on the needs of the adult.

Nzeneri (2006) opined that Adult Education in Nigeria is not just about literacy or remedial education to fill a gap. That it is what is needed and wanted by all as long as they are alive and regardless of previous education. This position is an assertion of Adekola (2008)'s claim that Adult Education included many of the subjects learned at school for those who never had the opportunity. Akintayo & Oghenekhow (2004), had earlier argued that Adult Education aims at providing lifelong Education that prepares the individual for change and creates dynamic frame of mind in the individual. This is because the world is constantly changing in all spheres including technology, communication and industry. Human's craving for learning is thus continuous to keep pace with the changes.

Barikor, Eheazu and Nzeneri (2013), rightly described this urge for continuous learning as 'cradle to grave'. One never stops desiring to know new things as long as life continues. The good thing about this insatiable desire is that when each individual is equipped through lifelong skills and knowledge, Nigeria's hope for the realization of accelerated development would be enhanced. These include eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV / Aids, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004).

Adult education as a programme of study on the other hand, refers to any educational programme(s) developed by a tertiary institution and organized as an academic plan to move its beneficiaries towards a career path in helping adults to learn. It means been awarded a university degree as a qualified adult education facilitator who can positively motivate other adults to learn. We must not forget that adults are the ones presently at the hem

of *all* human affairs. Deductive reasoning would reveal that if adult education clientele (the adults), can be found in all spheres; then adult education as a profession covers all human endeavours. Nwafor (2006) calls this all-encompassing tendency, jack of all trade; master of all. This makes it imperative to offer these adults varied learning opportunities to enable them impact the society no matter their walks of life. Thus, the need to train individuals who should be able to guide these adults as desired. This is the simple reason for having Adult education as a programme of study in Nigerian Universities. Universities and their equivalents are the final breeding ground for the Nigerian intellectual labour force as it were, hence the introduction of adult education as a course of study. Our focus in this study is to highlight the prospect this certification holds for these trained adult education facilitators.

The National Policy on Education (2004, p.9) already provided Adult and non-formal education as an instrument par excellence for lifelong education. Section 6 of the Policy outlined the goals of adult and non-formal education to include providing functional literacy and continuing education for adults and the youths, provide education for different categories of completers of the formal education system to improve their basic knowledge and skills, provide in-service, on-the-job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and give adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetics, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment. This paper however focuses on the need for Adult Education as a programme of study in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

The need for Adult Education in our Universities

Adult education as a programme of study on our campuses has multiplier effects. Adult education utilizes subtle ways to lure and retain adults in learning experiences. Through the process of diffusion and assimilation, adult learning facilitators can begin their job of positive influence right there on the campuses. The three universities highlighted in this study, all stand out each as a prestigious university in one area or the other. Permit this to be alluded to a very subtle but heavily influential course of study (adult education) which found her way on their campuses. Students of adult education engage in self-exploration activities like learning about foreign cultures and educational systems which allow them to be more conscious of their conditions and better ways to introduce desirable change. Nafukho (2005) states that the success or performance of adult education can be qualified in terms of the positive changes that occur in the attitude of individual beneficiaries. Adult education can also help to bring about respect for the diversity of cultures and customs by shaping the attitudes and perceptions of individuals regarding various aspects of society affecting them. This means that by bringing about awareness among the adult learners on the interrelationship that exist between rapid population increase, poverty, illiteracy and national development; adult education can help them make conscious and informed decisions regarding the importance of literacy, family size, and family planning and also became aware of the process and consequences of population growth on the quality of life and environment (Olajide, 2003).

Adult education is also necessary on campuses because it can help individuals to have the desire for change and develop insights that make change became feasible in all aspects of life. It is one thing to have a skill and it is another thing to be able to market that skill. Adult education can also help adults have conscious and effective co-operations that churn profit (Dokubo, 2012). That is to say, adult education has the capacity to provide men and women with the vocational skills and communication skills that are relevant to help them develop and improve their working life.

However, despite the numerous benefits, adult education holds for our campuses; the course is yet to be given its pride of place amongst other courses. It is still regarded as a dumping ground for those who could not get admission into law and social science faculties. Parents still question their wards' future if allowed to accept admission offered in adult education as a programme of study. A large percentage of students of the course never applied for it; they were just offered as an alternative. They just came in believing it could just serve as a buffer while waiting for their dream courses. With this *laissez-faire* mindset, they go through the course not appreciating its varied content. Abuse, they say is inevitable when the purpose of a thing is not known. They leave as unworthy ambassadors of the course into the society. This is the anomaly this paper seeks to address.

Brief Overview of Three (3) Nigerian Universities offering Adult Education as a Programme of Study

- 1. Rivers State University (RSU)**, formerly Rivers State University of Science and Technology, is a university located in the Diobu area of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The university was established in October, 1980 from the Rivers State College of Science and Technology which was itself established in 1972. (Rivers State University, 2017). The University has seven faculties; Agriculture, Engineering, Environmental Sciences, Law, Management Sciences, Science, Education; and a budding college of medicine. The University runs 37 programmes at the undergraduate level and 86 at the postgraduate level. Rivers State University is the first technological university in Nigeria and also the first university to be situated within the Niger Delta. In 2014, it was rated as Nigeria's best E-learning institution and was ranked as the 15th best university in the country (Rivers State University, 2017). Rumour has it that adult education as a programme of study was

introduced in the school because oil companies located within the region needed trained personnel who could amicably liaise with host communities for community development projects. Until about four (4) months ago, when the programme became an autonomous department, adult education was an option in the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Rivers State University.

- 2. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka, (UNN)**, is the second university highlighted in this study. It is a federal university located in Nsukka, Enugu State, Eastern Nigeria. Founded by Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1955 and formally opened on 7 October 1960. In the 1981/82 academic session, the University's Department of Education was restructured into one Department and two sub-departments, namely Department of Educational Foundations, Sub-Department of Arts Education, and Sub-Department of Science Education. Adult Education was housed under the sub-department of Arts Education. (The University of Nigeria, Nsukka 2019). The University of Nigeria has three campuses – Nsukka, Enugu, and Ituku-Ozalla – all located in Enugu State. The University of Nigeria was the first full-fledged indigenous and first autonomous university in Nigeria, modelled upon the American educational system. It is the first land-grant university in Africa and one of the five elite universities in Nigeria. The university has 15 Faculties and 102 academic departments. The University offers 82 undergraduate programs and 211 postgraduate programmes. The university celebrated its 50th anniversary on October 2010. (The University of Nigeria, Nsukka 2019).
- 3. The University of Ibadan (UI)** is the last university to be studied in this work. It is the oldest Nigerian university and the mother of formal adult education in Nigerian Universities. Established in 1948, the University of Ibadan, was a College of the University of London in a special relationship scheme Until 1962 when it became a full-fledged independent University. In September 1964 the department of Extra-Mural Studies became the department of Adult Education when the two-year Diploma in Adult Education and Community Development was introduced. Besides the College of Medicine, there are twelve other faculties: Arts, Science, Agriculture and Forestry, Renewable Natural Resources, Social Sciences, Education, Veterinary Medicine, Pharmacy, Technology, Law, Public Health, and Dentistry. A thirteenth, Economics, Environmental Design and Management, is proposed. In September 2016, it became the first Nigerian university to make the top 1000 in Times Higher Education rankings. Prior to that, it had always made the top African 10 in Webometrics Rankings. (The University of Ibadan, 2018).

Prospects of Adult Education to the Society

According to Adesanya (2006), Prospects are the important parts of the programme whose benefits we seek to derive. For instance, promoting literacy and general understanding for adults to become self-employed in order to improve the nation at large.

Anyanwu in Adesanya (2006) said that, no true advancement can be made without educating the masses. And that the ideal state is the one which everyone has not only the power but also the competence to debate and decide matters of national and international interest. Unfortunately, due to political and economic instability, religious misunderstanding and cultural backgrounds education has been basically neglected. The result is that many children reach the age of adulthood but cannot read and write. The nation is forced to miss out on the quota of advancement, these people would have brought. Adekola (2008) puts it thus;

Illiteracy has been regarded as an enemy and evil which keep people in darkness, bound to their traditional superstitions which make the people resist change in their ideas and isolated from progress. Thus; unaware and incapable of meeting demand of their changing environment and ever progressing world.
(p. 65)

In Nigeria, the above scenario played out during the introduction of Western education by the Europeans people in the country. Those areas which accepted Western Education earlier, developed faster than those areas which resisted western education at first (Ihejirika, 2000). This is an indication that adult education helped them combat limiting superstitions and prejudice, in the sense that it made them think and reason on what they should believe and do to help their conditions. A very glaring example of the impact of adult education on the society is the fact that highly developed countries have very low illiteracy index (some as low as 2%) while developing countries like Nigeria have an index of up to 31% (Ihejirika, 2007). Education is truly a liberating force therefore; we must realise that it's in fact a critical movement for us Nigerians to educate the not so fortunate ones who missed basic education in our midst so as to usher them into the world of letters and numbers where things operate at a speed that facilitates development. They will in turn contribute to socio-economic and practical development of the nation in some of the ways listed:

- 1. Increase in productive capabilities:** When adult education liberates an unlettered adult, who missed out on formal education; literacy just like power intoxicates and spurs that adult towards developmental activities. One just staggers unto development activities uncontrollably when armed with the right information. A well-educated adult farmer will not only know how and when to apply fertilizers, but will know how to increase his productive capabilities with modern technological systems. This will invariably

- increase the Gross National Product of the country. Just imagine what a productive Nigeria, we would have if all adult education graduates are able to help introduce one unlettered adult to literacy.
2. Increase in the literacy level of the labour force: Just like the first point above, literacy helps one reduce trial and error experiences. The contribution in this form is that, within a given occupation, a better educated person is likely to do a better job than a less educated one, because additional education is expected to make an individual more aware of better ways of doing things. Literacy will help the individual to:
 - a) Have a liberal mind and positive orientation towards life and its related activities;
 - b) Accept and appreciate changes and innovations which may enhance his productivity;
 - c) Improve his health habits which have implication for his effective contribution to the economy; a sickly individual can hardly make any meaningful contribution to the economy;
 - d) Generate ideas and information which may assist others to improve their performances within the economy.
 3. Reduction in Maternal and Infant mortality rates: Literate mothers are more able to look after their own health and that of their children and also to attend to ante-natal and post-natal clinics regularly.
 4. Transformation of individuals, communities, entire social structures and societies.

Having adult education as a programme of study holds innumerable benefits for the society and the world at large. This is because adult education as a programme of study, seeks ways to better the lives of adults who are the livewire of the society. They are at the hem of all human endeavours. Adults are people who know the reason why they should learn or participate in any teaching learning activities (Dokubo 2012). They only come to a programme when they perceive a gain to be derived. Every adult you see is longing for an adult education programme to meet an immediate need like driving, publishing, promotion, employment, etc. Adult education as a programme of study on or campuses will help highlight the possibility of life-long learning for all categories of adult learners. People would understand that there is no old brain that can no longer synthesize knowledge once there is a will. Andragogy skills in adult education even accentuates the fact that adults learn better because they build on previous knowledge and experiences (Nzeneri, 2006).

Adult education as a programme of study on our campuses will also contribute in no small measure to the economic, political and social dimension of development of the society. For example, adult education on a daily basis strives to bring into existence a population of citizens with an understanding of public tasks who make demands that bring about the development of a country. (Ihejirika, 2000). The Dubai we envy today rose to that height through adult education. In 1975, Dubai had an adult literacy rate of 54 percent among men and 31 percent among women. Today, adult literacy rates for both genders is close to 95 percent. (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates 2018). If only Nigeria would stop paying lip service to adult education in order to enable unlettered adults contribute their own quota to national development. No country can rise above the quality of her educational system no matter the resources they are blessed with.

Ihejirika, (2000) however, observed that the most central thing about the Nigerian education system presently provided is that it is basically an elitist education designed to meet the needs of the few privileged or small proportion of those people who enter formal school system. This inequality led him to favour adult education as a balancing factor that can access the large percentage of adults who are not opportune to attend formal schools. He further explained that first we must prioritize adult education or educating adults because our children will not have an impact on our economic development for five, ten or even twenty years. This means that the impact of adults on national development is immediate unlike children whose impact will be felt after they have completed formal education.

Adult education is also considered to be an empowering process (Anyanwu, 2002). This means that adult education has the capacity to equip men and women to contribute to community and national development. It is also worthy to be supported because it has a symbiotic relationship with the environment within which it operates. Adult education is needed as it has goals that are rooted in the improvement of the quality of life itself (Nafukho, Amutabi, and Olunga 2005). Adult education enables men and women increase their control over themselves and also contribute to their own lives and also the social environment where they live. This is mainly achieved through the process of conscientization. If we encourage adult education as a programme of study, in the nearest future, there would be no unhealthy environmental practices like defecating in rivers, pouring wastes in gutters, pipeline vandalization, etc. All the money government spends on correcting these environmental hazards can then be channeled to other profitable ventures.

Prospects of Adult Education as a Programme Of Study to the Students

Adults are the clientele of adult education and majority of the times; these adults abhor school because lecturers who lack adult education skills use their ages to insinuate that they no longer have sharp brains to learn anything. According to Kobani (2004), assumptions about the elderly have led to prejudice and false notions about them. They can still learn as much as the younger ones. Adult education as a programme of study addresses this by

instilling proper andragogy (the act of helping adults learn) skills in its beneficiaries so that they won't scare away the already tensed adults who come for adult education programmes under their auspices.

If adult education involves every human endeavour as earlier established in this paper, why train a set of people to spearhead it? What is its usefulness as a certified degree programme to graduates of the course? To answer these questions, let's borrow a leaf from another profession say medicine. Health is every one's concern but still we train professional medical doctors to handle more delicate health challenges. Same applies to adult education, while every adult is seeking ways to better their lot; trained adult education facilitators are needed to guide the process where needed. Adult education is indeed a noble profession as it seeks to better the lots of others.

In this seemingly herculean task of improving other people's lives, lies the uncountable benefits of the adult education as a programme of study. You can't possibly wash another man's hands without unintentionally cleaning your own hand in the process. There is no better way to improve a society than to get everyone thinking of becoming assets from which others can tap better ways of doing things to improve their lots.

Students of adult education are armed with life skills like swimming, typing, conflict resolution, computer, etc. in addition to a vocational teaching subject. Students of adult education also enjoy the privilege of being taught subtle strategies of conscientization, diffusion, assimilation, etc. This is because, guiding another adult to learn is a very dicey and delicate tasks requiring deep understanding of how to manipulate human psychology favourably and subtly. When these students eventually leave campus, these skills gathered in school would help them in no small ways to cope with life challenges.

Considering the rate of unemployment in the country; in fact, someone jokingly said, to succeed in Nigeria, you have to keep your certificate aside and hustle like a dropout. Faced with this sad reality, graduates of adult education can just decide to pursue a career in any of the life skills learnt on the programme. If opening an adult education training centre will be too expensive for them, they can start as home tutors for those requiring their services. They can recruit other of their colleagues armed with different life skills to start up a skill acquisition programme.

Graduates of adult education who get employed are likely to become better employees because they have been trained on how to relate with individuals conscientiously. If every workplace in Nigeria could be blessed with these set of trained adult educators, in the nearest future there would be tremendous improvement in production levels thereby resulting in increased profit for the nation.

Graduates of adult education can also play liaison roles wherever they find themselves because as students, they were also trained in conflict resolution. This is a much-needed skill in the Nigeria we have today. Mediators are needed in their numbers everywhere to contribute their own little quota to peace in the society. Restiveness has become the order of the day, and youths commit suicide in despair on a daily basis.

Graduates trained in oratory are a must-have in every circle. Tension and verbal scars are bad for the development we crave. Only a peaceful environment can support businesses and ventures that will accrue to national benefit. There is a close connection that exists between development and adult education or the education being provided to adults in a society (Umar, Eshak, Bichi, & Aujara, 2010). For example, the higher levels of development which seem to exist in conjunction with higher level of literacy clearly shows that the more adults become literate, the more chances of improving our society and also transforming the country's economy. It's not really that being educated gives one a better job but it also grants one the opportunity to do things better to achieve maximum results. Students of adult education are trained to constantly seek ways to improve people's lives and invariably improve their own lives too.

Suggestions

In order to redeem adult education as a programme of study, from the state of neglect, government should give all the necessary support needed to ensure success of the programme. Students of the course need to pull themselves from self-pity and explore the numerous benefits of the course as it unfolds to them. Graduates of the course still roaming the streets in search of employment, should just take up a career in any of the skills acquired on the course. Very soon, they too would be employers of labour contributing their own quota to make Nigeria great. Subsequently, university orientation exercises for freshers must portray the course as it truly is and not a course for alphabetization of old folks. If situations continue like this, experts of the course should consider rebranding (renaming) the course to make it more topical. Proper light must be thrown on the fact that training individuals who help adults learn is a very serious task because adults are behind every act (good or bad) happening in our society today. The job of training those to influence these happenings deserves some accolades sealed with a university degree as a proof of certification.

Conclusion

The prospects of adult education as a programme of study cannot be overemphasized. Adult education is vital in this employment seeking generation because it has the capacity to employ many people or increase the volume of employment in the nation. It plays this role by accumulating seasoned human capital who have developed

themselves and are ready to contribute their own quota to national development. This means that it enables people who are living in absolute poverty to acquire certain skills and knowledge that can raise their living standards. Adult education is also vital in the sense that it transmits the demands of the people to be heard by the government. It does this by moulding an informed citizen who is able to question the leadership in the society reasonably. According to Adekola (2008) adult education is an agency of progress as it prepares the individual for continuing adjustment to social functions. This simply means that the more educated or empowered the people are, the more rational they become in the society and this can drive economic and social development within the content of both local and global economy.

Conscious efforts must therefore be put in to ensure that people saddled with the responsibility of helping these adults learn are properly equipped to do so.

Adults are self-directed and know what they want to achieve before they embark on any educational activity, their attempts at learning should be rewarded with quality delivery. Any breach in their expectation might lead to withdrawal from the programme leaving them to still constitute nuisance to the society.

This study will close with the saying that no nation can rise above the qualities of her teachers, therefore training these teachers (especially the ones helping adults) must be taken seriously to arm them for their delicate task and foster national development at the same time.

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