Functional Adult Literacy Through the Integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Human Resource Development in Nigeria

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Abstract
Functional literacy is imperative for human resource development. Many adult literacy centres seem to focus mainly on the teaching of the skills of reading, writing and calculation. This paper elucidates various ways of building functionality in adult literacy programme through the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The functional potentials of ICT in adult literacy programme include critical consciousness, improved productivity; improved political participation, eradication of poverty, and maintaining relevance in the changing world. Conclusion was drawn and the following recommendations made: ICT should be integrated into adult literacy programme, adult educators and instructors should be trained on the use of ICT in teaching and learning process and the government should provide sufficient financial support for adult literacy programme.
Keywords: Functional Adult Literacy, ICT, for Human Resource Development, Nigeria

Introduction

Adult education is an educational programme which is planned and methodically applied for the training of those adults who did not benefit from the regular formal educational programmes at the early stage of their lives. It is an educational enterprise meant to provide literacy, remedial, and continuing education for adults and adolescents outside the regular educational system in order to complement, or supplement regular/formal education. Eyibe (2005), view adult education as any kind of education designed for the illiterate population, the formal school drop-out, and the unskilled and semi-skilled workers which is carried on outside the formal school setting. Adult literacy programme is an integral part of adult education which offers stack illiterate adults access to the three basic literacy skills of reading, writing and arithmetic (3Rs). Literacy programme is geared towards developing the ability of the recipient to have access to the printed word. This type of literacy programme is often referred to as traditional literacy (Asiedu and Oyedeji, 1985).

The present computer age, demands literacy programme that goes beyond the teaching of the 3Rs. This age requires functional literacy. Functional literacy is work-oriented, career-oriented or occupation-oriented literacy. According to Asiedu and Oyedeji (1985), functional literacy is tailor-made to the needs of a group or individuals, in content and method, and combines the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic with social, technical and occupational training. Functional literacy is the type of education directed to one's occupation or one's way of life and that is of immediate use to the recipient in his work (Alao, 1990). A cursory look into most literacy programmes in adult education centres indicates absence of functionality in those programmes. Functional literacy should be all-embracing, covering the educational, economic, political, social, psychological and cultural life of the adult learners.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has made the world of a global village. ICT has altered the process and products of various enterprises including education, thereby providing efficiency and effectiveness in various organizations. The traditional literacy which focuses mainly on the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetics is insufficient for enabling the adult learners adapt in this computer age. Literacy programme of the adult learner need to be made functional in order to produce functional adult populace who could contribute meaningfully in nation building. One of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Goals and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to provide literacy for all. There is a correlation between literacy and human capital development. This correlation according to Ugwoegbu (2003) gave rise to the idea of functional literacy as an educational, social and economic activity in areas regarded as priorities for development. ICT possesses the potential of providing functional literacy for adult learners if well integrated in the programme. The integration of ICT into adult literacy programme will go a long way to adequately develop the adult populace who form the human capital resources of the nation. This paper therefore elucidates the various ways adult literacy programme and the adult recipients can be made functional through ICT.

Functionality of Adult Education Programme through the Integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Adult literacy programme can be made functional through the integration of information and communication technology. The integration of ICT into adult literacy programme could help to achieve functionality of the

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programme and adult learners in the following ways:

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking deals with creative and judgmental thinking ability. According to Onu and Ikeme (2008), critical thinking involves using one's brain to mentally manipulate information to form concepts, solve problems, reason and take decisions. They stress that critical thinking is the act of using the mind to conceive ideas, draw inferences, and make judgments. Onu and Ikeme (2008) lamented that very few people utilize their ability to think thereby allowing themselves to be caged by their problems.

There is need for functional adult literacy programme geared by ICT in order to develop in the adult learners critical thinking skills which is an entrepreneurship quality needed for human capital development. According to Asiedu and Onyedeji (1985), an illiterate is not just one who cannot decipher the written word, but one who lives in a state of ignorance, existing but does not participate in the world. Illiterate adult learners require to go through the process of critical consciousness so that they can appreciate more clearly the dimensions of their problems, and how to satisfy their individual and societal needs. Functional adult literacy integrated with ICT training could instill in the adult learners critical thinking skill through information processing. According to Landu (2011:130) ICT training involves five critical (thinking) skill tasks namely:

Access: Ability to not only know what to collect but also knowing how to collect and retrieve information.
Manage: This include ability to apply skills and tasks in an existing organization or scheme.
Integrate: Ability to interpret and represent information.
Evaluate: A task of making judgment concerning the quality, relevance, usefulness or efficiency of information.
Create: The tasks of generating information by adapting, applying, designing, investing information.

The adult populace is laden with a lot of life tasks which if not articulately tackled could lead to untimely death. It is therefore of utmost importance that the adults are equipped with the skill of critical thinking. Critical thinking skill will help the adult learners to critically examine situations and issues confronting them, thereby become sensitized to take positive decisions and actions to tackle the challenges of life.

Improved Productivity

It has been observed that many adult education centres in Nigeria are merely offering basic and secondary education to the adult learners, who did not have the opportunity of attending school when they were young. Functionality of adult literacy programme requires that literacy programme should be steered from mere teaching of the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetics. Adult literacy ought to move beyond offering basic and secondary education to adults who did not go to school early in life to being occupation-oriented. Education provided for the adult learners ought to have a direct link to the occupation of the adults. Occupation-oriented education for the adult learners will help to produce functional adult populace indispensable for national development.

Certain needs propel the adults into enrolling into adult education programme in spite of their busy schedule. Mbah (2006) found that many adult learners in adult education centres enrolled into the programme in order to improve their trade. ICT offers the adult learners modern, effective and efficient ways of carrying out their various trades. ICT has permeated every human endeavour and makes tasks less burdensome, enjoyable, and easy with improved and increased productivity. Umoh (2010) stated that the integration of ICT in education will assist in enhancing the human resource of the country. Hence there is need to infuse ICT into adult literacy programme in order to teach the adult learners the ICT base of their various occupations so that they could become more effective and efficient in their jobs.

Improved Political Participation

Man is a political being. Adults as well as youths all over the world are engaged in one political activity or the other. Adults engage in politics in order to influence the government of their countries to take decisions and actions that will enhance their condition of living and that of future generations. It is not enough for adult learners in adult literacy centres to learn how to read and write. They should as well be able to decide on things that affect them, which is one of their fundamental human rights. Functional adult literacy programme enables the adult learners to promote democracy, giving them access to the manifestoes of various political parties, so that they can independently decide who to vote for, instead of being misled by unscrupulous politicians. According to Ocho (2005:88), "the educational system which seeks to preserve, transmit, change and advance the culture of the people, depends on the political class to perform its roles effectively or otherwise". He buttresses that no aspect of private life or of education or public life can advance beyond the level and will of the political class. The adult populace forms the political class of any nation. It is therefore imperative that adult literacy programme be made politically functional, so that the adult learners will be well-equipped to participate in politics and become agents of positive change in every sector of the economy.

Functional adult literacy programme, infused with information and communication technology will help

to reduce the incidence of deceit and gullibility amongst adult illiterates as it concerns political issues. According to World Bank (2002),ICTs create economic, social and political empowerment opportunities for poor people in the developing world. When adult learners are adequately equipped with ICT skills, they can make their voices head on political issues through the radio, mobile phones, television, internet, fax. They could easily access information on political matters and contribute their quota for good governance in their country.

Eradication of Poverty
One of the major challenges facing the developing countries is that of high rate of poverty. Ume (1987) stated that poverty in developing countries and Nigeria in particular is real and that the poor number in millions. The degree of poverty in Nigeria is enormous and has serious negative effects on the people, especially the adult populace on whom the welfare of the children and the youth lie. Hence, any meaningful adult literacy programme for adult illiterates ought to be functional in terms of wealth creation.

One of the eight United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to eradicate poverty and hunger (Maduewesi, 2005). Poverty could be eradicated through entrepreneurship training in adult education centres. Infusing entrepreneurship training in adult literacy classes will equip the adults with salable skills with which to create wealth. Entrepreneurship training for the adult learners will help them to be employers of labour, thereby tackling the problem of unemployment and youth restiveness in the country. Umoh (2010) stated that functional education should engender in the learner the possession of skills which will make them functional members of the society on graduation.

The integration of ICT in adult literacy programme could assist in equipping the adult learners with employable skills. The adult learners on graduation could then open up ICT business centres for income generation. They could be trained on the mechanics of ICT facilities. ICT has the potential of equipping people with various entrepreneurship skills such as internet services, data analysis, printing, designing and various art works.

Relevance in the Changing World
No adult literacy programme could be said to be functional if it does not help the learners to adapt to situations in the changing world. The dynamic nature of the society and the world at large poses certain challenges which call for adult literacy programme that will help them to keep abreast with current issues, so that they can remain relevant in their trades and other aspects of their lives. We are presently living in information age, characterized by the acquisition, analysis, and communication of information through the use of ICT facilities. This age is the age of computer and other forms of communication which constitute the information super high way. It is characterized by the use of computer-based information systems to convert, store, protect, process, transmit and retrieve information.

The internet opens the world of knowledge with large quantity of information made available by diverse people and institutions which could solve most information related problems. Advances in the field of ICT have brought about changes in lifestyles, education, governance, organizations and industries. Advancement in research, science and technology has brought about knowledge expansion, and current issues today become obsolete in near future.

Adult literacy centres need to integrate ICT training in their programmes in order to equip the adult learners with the skill of information retrieval, storage, processing and transmission. ICT skill will help the adult learners to keep abreast with current issues in different fields of life, thereby moving with and remaining relevant in the changing world. Crises in Nigerian education system and in adult education in particular could obstruct free flow of information in conventional classroom setting. Some of the crises include: inadequate infrastructure, lack of reading materials, over-populated classrooms, and inadequate qualified teaching personnel (Odo, 2010). These crises need urgent ICT intervention in adult literacy programmes for the functionality of the programme.

Conclusion
Literacy is a tool for wiping out illiteracy which hampers development. Adult literacy programme is an integral part of adult education which focuses on teaching the basic literacy skills of reading, writing, and arithmetics to stack illiterate adults. Literacy programme need to be made functional in order to equip the recipients with functional skills with which they can function effectively and efficiently in their various trades and be able to contribute meaningfully to the development of their country.

In this age of computer, it is becoming increasingly difficult for anyone to function effectively in any field without good knowledge and skill in ICT. Adult literacy centres therefore have to incorporate ICT skills in their programmes. The incorporation of ICT skills into literacy programmes of the adult learners hold a lot of benefits that cannot be over emphasized. The paper have delved into some of the ways the integration of ICT in adult literacy programme will help to make the programme and the recipients functional. Integration of ICT in adult literacy programmes will surely contribute to the achievement of the goals of Universal Basic Education

(UBE) and that of Millennium Development goals.

Recommendations

1.   ICT should be integrated into adult literacy programme.
2.   Adult educators and instructors should be trained on the use of ICT in teaching and learning process.
3.   The government should provide sufficient financial support for adult literacy programme.

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