



ADULT EDUCATION: PANACEA FOR ADULT LEARNERS SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIA

Kehinde O. OGUNYINKA PhD^{1*}, Francisca O. AWOGOKE², Richard A. ADEDIRAN³

^{1,2,3}Department of Continuing/Adult & Non-Formal Education, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo
ogunyinkako@aceondo.edu.ng*

Abstract

The field of adult education as a discipline and practice is indispensable in socioeconomic cum political development in the 21st Century Nigeria. It is designed as a practice that engages adult learners in systemic and sustainable educational activities for adults to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, norms, and values that can bring about socio-economic and political development for the overall development of the nation. The study examined adult education as an essential tool for achieving the socio-economic and political development of adult learners for the overall growth and development of Nigeria. The study has concluded that to meet the socio-economic challenges of 21st-century Nigeria, all education providers and policymakers must re-think and redesign adult education curricula. It is imperative to redesign adult education and vocational skills acquisition programmes to achieve the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria. It is recommended that adult education should be considered as one of the driving forces for socio-economic and political development in Nigeria. There should be an integration of adult education programmes with inclusive curricula along with general and conventional education at all levels. Adult vocational and technical education should be promoted in all literacy centres across the country and must be fully funded by the government to achieve meaningful results.

Keywords: adult education, adult learners, socio-economic and political development

Introduction

The development of any nation is greatly dependent on the provision of essential services such as education to its citizens. The development of human potential must be directed towards sustaining the social, economic, and political aspects of people's lives in the nation. This can only be achieved through direct investment in education and adult education programmes aimed at creating wealth and promoting literacy education for all citizens (Abua et al., 2019). Adult education plays a crucial role in the socio-economic and political development of adult learners in Nigeria. According to Annan (2005), adult education is the foundation of development and a key factor in driving social and economic change in society. It is also a practical tool for empowering adult learners, which ultimately leads to social development and environmental protection in the nation. Similarly, the United Nations (2005) believes that adult education can significantly reduce poverty, expand employment opportunities, promote gender equity, improve family health, protect the environment, and advance the core political and democratic values of a nation.

In 1996, Dellors proposed four pillars of education for the future, as cited in (Ogunyinka & Olaitan, 2019), which include: learning to know (mastering learning tools instead of just acquiring structured knowledge), learning to do (innovating and adopting learning to future environments), learning to live



together with others (peacefully resolution of conflict, discovering other people and their cultures, fostering community capacity, individual competencies and capacity, economic resilience, and social inclusion). From this, it is evident that adult education has become a means to achieve the needs of citizens through development. Thus, adult education can serve as a means to improve the socio-economic and political status of people in society and to bring about the desired overall development of a nation. Adult education also serves as a means for active socio-economic and political participation of people through various empowerment programmes and engaging them in areas of need for the improvement and development of the nation as a whole.

Concept of Adult Education

Understanding the concept of adult education is crucial for various reasons. Adult education helps adult learners acquire the necessary skills to survive and sustain themselves in society. It provides knowledge and skills that boost individuals' potential for economic empowerment, political participation, better livelihood, and societal development (Okemakinde & Ogunyinka, 2016). However, the concept of adult education has evolved over the years, and its understanding varies between Third World nations and developed countries. Braimoh (1990), cited in (Ogunyinka & Okemakinde, 2016), posited a two-fold responsibility of human growth that can be facilitated by an adult and non-formal education programme. The first responsibility is achieving self-realization, while the second responsibility is becoming a more responsible citizen in society. UNESCO (2001), on the other hand, noted that adult education is so closely related to the social, political, and cultural conditions of each country and no uniform or precise definition can be arrived at, even within a country.

According to the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1981) as cited in Abua (2019), adult education refers to a form of education that includes functional literacy, remedial, continuing vocational, aesthetic, and civic education for youths and adults, outside the formal schooling system. Adult education is a multidisciplinary field that explores specific philosophies of learning and teaching, based on the belief that adults can and want to learn, and are capable of taking responsibility for their learning. The learning process should also respond to the needs of the learners. Adult education refers to the process of imparting general, technical, or vocational knowledge, alongside skills, values, and attitudes. It takes place outside of the formal school education system and aims to address the early inadequacies of mature individuals or equip 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). Oni (2003) describes adult education as purposively designed to liberate individuals from ignorance and dependency and make them conscious of their environment. Through adult education, individuals can meaningfully contribute to the overall development of their immediate society. It improves an individual's control over freedom, increasing their control over themselves and the environment in which they live.

The definition of Adult Education according to Betinag (2004) as cited in Abua (2019) presented during the 1st International Congress on Comparative Study of Adult Education is “a process whereby a person who no longer attends school on a regular or full-time basis (unless full-time programmes are specially designed for an adult) undertake sequential and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, understanding or skills, appreciation, and attitudes or to identify and solve personal and community problems.” The definition aims to help adult learners acquire competencies in areas related to skills, attitudes, and knowledge. This will enable them to



effectively tackle their personal and collective societal challenges, with the ultimate goal of contributing to the development of society and the nation as a whole. However, according to UNESCO as cited by Brown and Tomori in Nzeneri (2004), Adult education is the entire body of organized educational process, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in the schools, colleges or universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society in which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviours in the two-fold perspectives of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent, social, economic and cultural development. This explains how education impacts the economic and social environment of adults and their communities.

Importance of Adult Education

Adult education is designed to liberate people from ignorance and dependence and to improve their control over their own lives and freedoms. It also helps to improve family health, acquire new skills and knowledge, and protect the environment from degradation. Thus, adult education is essential for many reasons, including:

1. Building economic prosperity of citizens and the nation;
2. Adult education programmes allow people in society to acquire new skills and technology to improve society's economic technological advancement;
3. Adult education plays a crucial in addressing the issue of unemployment and under-employment. Vocational skills acquisition programs are especially helpful in providing free education to adult learners who are either unemployed or underemployed in society (Ogunyinka, 2018; Ogunyinka, 2016).
4. Adult education promotes strong communities by fostering healthy relationships and democratic institutions.
5. Adult education is a powerful tool for reaching specific groups within society, such as nomads, migrant fishermen, prisoners, and workers.

However, as plausible as adult education programmes are, it has some upheavals that may not allow it to achieve its lofty objectives and among such challenges are:

1. Poor funding of adult education.
2. Insufficient manpower and facilitators to run adult literacy programmes in various centres.
3. Inadequate and lack of instructional materials to facilitate the programme;
4. Lack of modern-day infrastructures to cater to the needs of the adult learner;
5. Most importantly inconsistency of government policy on adult education activity

If all the challenges related to adult education are properly addressed by the government and other stakeholders, it can catalyze to overcoming of various social and political challenges faced by society.

Clientele of Adult Education

The clients of adult education are the individuals who participate in adult education programs designed to help them acquire knowledge and new technical skills. These programs enable prospective adult learners to improve themselves and contribute meaningfully to the development of their immediate societies in areas such as economics, social, politics, or culture (Ogunyinka, 2016). These individuals may include those who have never attended school before, or those who dropped out of school for various reasons and



wish to return to complete their education. Participation in adult education may also involve individuals in part-time programs who want to improve their previously acquired skills and knowledge. In most cases, adult education is voluntary, which means that individuals cannot be forced into it unless they initiate it themselves. The law of the land may not enforce this type of education, so it should be done through persuasion and subtle means. The andragogical approach is the method used to teach adult education, as it involves intricate activities between human beings seeking knowledge, learners, and instructors.

Values of Adult Education

Individuals tend to value things that are important to their lives and contribute to their socio-economic development. The value of something is determined by why, what and how much an individual appreciates it. Assigning value to something means that it is useful for human endeavours. Therefore, considering the scope and importance of adult education concerning the overall development of society, it is clear that it holds an indispensable value for the socio-economic and political advancement of people in society. The NPE (1998) outlined the objectives of adult and continuing education which are as follows:

1. To provide functional literacy education for youths who have never had the advantage of any formal education;
2. To provide functional and remedial education for those young people who prematurely dropped out of the formal school system;
3. To provide further education for different categories of completers of the formal education system to improve their basic knowledge and skills; and
4. To give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural, and civic education for public enlightenment that can improve the socio-economic activities of the people in the society.

Adult Education for Socio-economic and Political Reconstruction

Education is widely recognized as a powerful tool for promoting the socio-economic and political growth of any country. Adult education, in particular, can be a direct means of achieving and sustaining this progress. This can be achieved through the provision of relevant and practical adult education programs that are designed to revitalize the economic growth and political development of the nation as a whole. Adult education can be a powerful tool for achieving environmental sustainability and socio-economic development. According to Ogunyinka & Olaitan (2019), implementing adult education programs in society can help reconstruct and revitalize human and capital resources needed for nation-building. Proper implementation of these programs can also lead to income generation for citizens and the nation as a whole, making individuals self-reliant and addressing issues of unemployment and under-employment. This can help people rise out of poverty and contribute to the socio-economic growth and political participation in the country. If relevant authorities and stakeholders in the field of education can provide adequate technological and functional instructional materials for the educational advancement of both youths and adults in society, the nation's economic growth can be achieved shortly. Adult education as a field of study encompasses all sectors. It is a process of transmitting vocational or technical knowledge, as well as values and attitudes that are necessary for achieving socio-economic and political development of a nation (Ogunyinka & Olaitan, 2018). Furthermore, Onane (2009) explains that adult education is now more important than ever as it has the potential to empower individuals and harness their creative forces for socio-economic development. It can also unlock the potential of communities and contribute to the overall wealth of the nation, particularly in a situation of global socio-economic reconstruction.



Conclusion and Recommendations

This study found that adult education must play a significant role in nation-building. To achieve this, policymakers and stakeholders in the field of education must create an enabling environment for adult education programs to thrive. Additionally, they must redesign the adult education curriculum to meet the socio-economic, political, and developmental needs of youths and adults. The paper recommends that adult education should be given adequate attention by the government and other stakeholders in the field of education. This includes administrators in adult education curriculum development, education planning, and implementation to create an inclusive adult education program that promotes socio-economic and political participation and emancipation of citizens. Further, more attention should be given to technological advancement and infrastructural development in the field of adult education. This will create an enabling environment for proper policy implementation of adult education for national development. Finally, to make adult education a driving force for socio-economic knowledge, all adult education programs must be adequately implemented and integrated into formal education curricula for the socio-economic and political development of the nation.

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