ADULT EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Adult education is an indispensable tool in the process of national development. It offers the adult members of the society opportunities to acquire skills, knowledge, competencies, attitudes, values etc., through one of its programme or the other. This helps in increasing the individuals’ ability to manage affairs, resources - both human and material. Ezimah (2004) remarked that leading industrial nations have made adult education a cornerstone in their development agenda and have benefitted from it – dating back to the industrial revolution in England in 18th century. Any nation that is aiming at being developed should place a premium on adult education.

Adult education is a major means of sharing the latest and most pertinent knowledge with people and through it, human resources can be developed to match effectively what seems an avalanche of technological improvement (William, 1974 in Obi, 1987). The activities of any given society are managed by adult members of such society, be it at community or national level. For such adult members to effectively carry out community or national tasks delegated to them, they need to acquire knowledge, skills, competencies and values. The more educated adult members of a society are, the better the society will be. Education of the adult group is vital to any development process. The development trends of the world reveal that leading industrial nations laid much importance on adult education. Ezewu (1998) rightly noted that no society can develop unless there are efficient men and women who can operate its social institutions. This paper tries to x-ray the role of adult education in national development.
Meaning of Adult Education

There is need to address the issue of who an adult is before attempting to explain what adult education is all about. In addressing who an adult is, certain parameters are used. From a general perspective, an adult could be considered especially by people outside the field of adult education, as a grown person; one who is legally of age, as opposed to a minor. Such a person is old enough to maintain a family. Akinpelu in Ojo (2011) remarked that for a person to be regarded as an adult, he/she must be certified qualitatively and quantitatively. Quantitatively, he/she must have reached certain age like say for instance, eighteen (18) years, marriageable and franchadizable. Having satisfied these requirements, he must have been qualitatively certified as being matured psychologically, sociologically, and economically. Rogers (1986 ) in Ochoma (2010) noted as follows:

*a wide range of concepts is involved when we use the term ‘adult’. The word can refer to a stage in life cycle of the individual....It can refer to status.... It can refer to a social sub-set: adults as distinct from children. Or it can include a set of ideas and values: adulthood (p.3).*

Adulthood as Ojo (2011) pointed out, is a stage of life where test of maturity and responsibility is ascertained. It is not only a test but also utility age. Besides being found to be matured and responsible, an adult is required to display inherent qualities before he can be referred to as an adult.

The meaning of the term ‘adult’ is vague, especially when it is used to identify the client of adult education. A person may be biologically an adult and have adult behavioural but still be treated as a child if he is under the legal age of maturity. On the other hand, one may legally be an adult but possess none of the maturity and responsibility that define adult character. The meaning of the term ‘adult’ as it is applicable in this context, is a person regarded as an adult by the society to which he belongs.

Adult Education

Like any other concept, the term ‘adult education’ does not have just a single definition. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (1976) recommended that:

*the term ‘adult education’ denotes the entire body of organised educational processes...whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications...bring about changes in their attitudes or behavior in the two fold perspectives of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social economic and cultural development.*
UNESCO’s recommendation on adult education is all embracing and pointedly highlights on the two main purposes of adult education which are: individual self-fulfillment and increase in social and economic participation.

Adult education can be considered as any organised informal or formal plan of education for adolescents and adults that are independent of the conventional school programme as administered by public or voluntary agencies, in so far as they believe that they will benefit from the programme. It caters for a wide heterogeneous audience in terms of age, sex, profession, social status, ethnic diversity, religious denomination and political affinity (Braimoh, 1990).

Adult education is a voluntary programme. It is not usually undertaken under any legal compulsion. It is undertaken at any age and for different purposes, deliberately or unconsciously for individual, group of people, community, state or for national progress. The scope of adult education cannot be visibly demarcated as learning in whatever form is a lifelong phenomenon and a continuous process. According to Anyanwu (1987), adult education is a part of the wider process of lifelong education and includes fundamental, general, vocational, professional, civic, social, cultural and recreational education for adults of all ages. Nyerere (1976) as cited in Nzeneri (1996) remarked that adult education incorporates anything which enlarges men’s understanding, activates them, helps them to make their decisions and to implement those decisions for themselves.

Adult education embraces the entire life of individuals and its purpose is to improve on what is i.e. the current state of affairs. It is directed to the people and so its curriculum content is based on the present needs and problems of the group or learner(s) as well as the society (Ochoma, 2010).

Some criteria that qualify a programme as adult education are as follows:
1. The activity must be purposeful.
2. The purpose of the activity must be educational.
3. The activities must be relatively organised.
4. The target audience must be the adult group.
5. It must be need-based.
6. It is carried out voluntarily without any compulsion on the part of the learner.
7. It is often carried out as part time or leisure time activity.
8. It is flexible in terms of contents and time.

Any form of education that satisfies the above criteria qualifies as adult education. It could be basic literacy, remedial education, functional literacy, continuing education, vocational education etc.
Objectives of Adult Education

In Nigeria, the objectives of adult education as contained in the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004: 25) are as follows:

1) Provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education. These include the nomads, migrant families, the disabled and other categories or groups, especially the disadvantaged gender;
2) Provide functional and remedial education for those young people who did not complete secondary education.
3) Provide education for different categories of completers of formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills.
4) Provide in-service, on-the-job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills; and
5) Give adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

The above objectives serve a number of purposes, ranging from individual’s personal growth to societal development. The major focus of adult education is first and foremost to make adult in the community aware of individual and community needs, and secondly to get educated in order to cope with and tackle immediate problem(s). It is directed at the people of the community hence, its curriculum is based on principles, needs and problems.

The Concept of Development

Development at any level - individual, community or national, has a purpose which is the liberation of man. It is for man, by man and of man (Nyerere, 1978). It is man’s attempts to transform nature in order to improve his own condition (Ezimah in Ochoma 2010). It has to do with all aspects of the people’s life-economic, political, legal, social etc. It does with the satisfaction of basic needs in all aspects of the people’s life. It has been referred to as the sum total of all activities and processes, directed towards the attainment, and qualitative realisation of a state of affair, characterised by adequate human happiness, welfare, human mastery of his environment and free individual participation in the affairs of the state (Ochoma, 2010).

Ume (1987) remarked that development in all societies must have at least the following three objectives:

1. To increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health and protection.
2. To raise the levels of living including, in addition to higher incomes, the provision of more jobs, better education and greater attention to cultural and humanistic values, all of which will serve not only to enhance material well-being, but also to generate individual and national self-esteem.
3. To expand the range of economic and social choice to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence, not only in reaction to other people and nation state, but also to the forces of ignorance and humanity misery.

The Concept of National Development

National development is the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people e.g. by providing infrastructures such as roads, hospitals, airport, schools etc. Ogbinaka (1999) in Ahiakwo (2007) remarked that it refers to sum total of the results of the functional relationship between manual and intellectual labour of a nation in the struggle for self-sustenance. Ahiakwo pointed out that it involves everything that is done within a nation with a view to uplifting the standard of men, women and materials. Ume (1987) noted that most nations of the world aspire for development and that development is only meaningful when there is total participation in the socio-economic and political life of the population.

There can be no national development if the general population of a given nation is not developed. People can however not develop without education. The education that is very paramount to national development is the education of the adult group.

Roles of Adult Education in National Development

Education generally is a topical issue in the quest for national development. In Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004:4), it is stated that “education in Nigeria is an instrument par excellence for effecting national development”. Education is an essential instrument in enhancing development process in terms of increasing resources available to a society and also ensuring that the resources are equitably distributed among the people, organisation and communities in the society (Ochoma, (2010).

Education for development according to Obi (1987) does not imply just formal education for children and adolescents at primary, secondary and the tertiary levels; it implies also education on part time basis given to adults of all educational backgrounds, who are already working and participating in development efforts. The latter type of education comes under the umbrella name of Adult Education. Perhaps, this is the kind of education that Ake (1998) was referring to when he asserted “Education is the process of becoming the best you can be. It begins when we are born and does not end until we die. To stop being educable is a sort of death”. This kind of education is not limited to the school education. It is the education that continues even after the compulsory school years. Azikiwe in Saro-Wiwa (1998) noted that:

*we seek for education to enable us discover facts and to be objective in analyzing social situations, balancing possible factors, collating these into acceptable theses and formulating logical premises before arriving at conclusions which could be regarded as fair and reasonable (p.58).*
Adult education enables individuals acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies which can be immediately utilised for the good of the individual and the society in general. Application of knowledge, skill, etc, gained from one adult education programme or the other leads first to individual development or what Tight (1996) referred to as ‘micro development’. Harrison (1992) pointed out that education is a major contributor to that development process, because it directly and continuously affects the formation not only of knowledge and ability but also of character and culture, aspirations and achievements.

Development generally and national development in particular cannot be achieved without the active participation of the adult members of the society. Nyerere in his famous Arusha Declaration of 1968 as cited in Obi (1987) asserted that “the development of a country is brought about by people not by money. Money and wealth it represents are the result and not the basis of development”. Participation of people in development efforts is made possible only when people know what to do and how to do it and have the urge to do it. For the people to do these, they have to be equipped with adequate knowledge, skills, values, competencies which determine the number and quality of labour forces (indices of national development), available. According to Obi (1987), experiences of recent years have shown that no nation can develop beyond the level of education of its citizens.

Kawawa (1971) cited in Obi (1987) remarked that true development means the development of the people not of things. He further pointed out that a nation is not really developing if dams, roads, factories or modern farms are built or established while the people are seen as passive receivers of those things or simply labourers in the productive enterprise. Howard (1978) in Obi in like terms asserted that development strategy that does not look upon people as an asset can only lead to a dead end. The skills, knowledge and capability of individual who will both contribute to and consume the proceeds of development must be developed for development to be meaningful. This can be done by one programme of adult education or the other.

Adult education programmes unlike education for children/ youths, centre on the immediate needs and problems of the adults in their homes, social and occupational roles, civic and economic interests and therefore have immediate direct positive relationship with development objectives at any level – individual, community, or national. Without adult education at all levels for all citizens of a country, the objectives of national development plans cannot fully be achieved because majority of the productive manpower in a country will not be effectively mobilised for participation in the development plans (Ifebigh in Obi, 1987).
There can be no national development without visible changes in the lives of the people of the society. Coping with changes can be a difficult task on adults because they are self-directing and independent. Adult education programmes are needed to help them adjust to changes in order to make them subjects of such changes. Adult education is thus indispensable in a nation that is experiencing development and thus changes, as it helps to prepare the members for the changes and at the same time, enables them to accommodate the plethora of changes that arise in their environment. Moreover, there is need to enlighten the people to discard their old values, attitudes and beliefs that could hinder the attainment of desired changes that are geared towards development. Mass mobilisation and education of the adult members in order to achieve meaningful participation in the process of change is of utmost importance. Ifebigh in Obi (1987) remarked that:

\[ \text{societies change according to the changing conditions of time, therefore all adults should learn to continue learning so as to equip themselves to meet the challenges of modern industrial life (p.80).} \]

Ahiakwo (2004) pointed out that national development must start from the community. This is because the culture and traditions of the people are rooted in the communities. Community education, which is a programme of adult education, is of crucial importance as it serves the entire community by providing for the educational needs of all community members (Anyanwu, 1987). The ultimate goal of community education is to develop the process by which members of the community may learn to work together to identify problems. Operations of community education require a process where learning can be used for individual, community, national and global betterment (Ahiakwo, 2004).

The purpose of adult literacy education, a programme of adult education, is to help move people from whatever level of consciousness they operate in presently to the level of consciousness wherein they can ask questions about things around them and change their lives. Change in the right direction in the lives of people in the community stimulates development potentials in them which in the long-run, will have a multiplier effect on social, economic and national growth.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Development of the people precedes development of the nation. The people concerned in development process are the adult members. The education of the adult members is crucial to national development as skills, knowledge, competencies, attitudes, aptitudes etc. are acquired through one programme of adult education or the other.

In view of the important roles adult education play in developing the individuals and the society, it is imperative that the government at all levels should create enabling
environment through the provision of adequate materials and facilities required to educate the adult members right from the grass-root levels.

Adequate sensitisation should be carried out to get people aware of the importance of continuous learning. All avenues can be used to achieve this – the church, school, media, village meetings etc.

References


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