

THE ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATION IN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The paper examines the role of adult education in achieving national unity, political participation and democracy, and leadership (raining, which are the major elements that characterize political development of any nation. For effective result, it recommends that adult education be an open and flexible system; apply imperative participatory methods and approaches; encourage all inclusive participation; and its programme to focus on developing independent and critical judgment in the participants. U concludes that adult education be manipulated in form and content to create appropriate altitudes among the people.

Introduction

Most African countries (including Nigeria) are on the verge of great political changes which will dictate, may be for several decades, the form of things to expect in these countries. Even the nasty upheavals that plague national life will pass away, one hopes, and people shall emerge into the clear day of reason and freedom and common sense. Perhaps, we have to remind ourselves the fact that political freedom cannot, per se, guarantee the "good life"¹¹ for any society. Historical records show how many countries (the world over), which are politically emancipated, are still enslaved by other chains, which constitute a barrier to the good life. In fact, a people cannot even keep their political freedom unless they are ready to pay the price for it in terms of perpetual vigilance which demands proper civic and political education. If Nigeria's objective is higher and she wishes to adopt political liberty as a stepping-stone to social emancipation and economic democracy, then certainly she needs a much higher standard of education for the masses of the people. On the contrary, there is the ever-present danger that the intelligent but unscrupulous people for their selfish goals may exploit the so-called "liberty". It is for these political reasons that this paper examines Adult Education as a potent tool for political development. Prior to the discussion the two concepts, 'Adult Education' and 'Political Development' require some explanations.

What is Adult Education?

The concept of "Adult Education" has been variously defined in different countries and by different writers because of its amorphous and diverse nature in terms of sponsors, subject •- matter, clientele, teaching techniques, strategies, programme duration, etc. However, there are stereotyped conceptions of adult education based on the element just mentioned. For instance, adult education is defined by the Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE, 1973) as:

A process whereby men and women undertake sequential and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge or skills, appreciation and attitudes; or for the purpose of identifying and showing personal or community need.

It goes on to define an adult as "someone who, besides being biologically mature, is fitting an adult role in society and is not attending a full-time educational institution (of the type normally catering for juveniles)" (NNCAE, 1973).

The NNACE (1973) definition implies that adult should not only be biologically mature but also socially, with a degree of independence. Social maturity is ability to accept social responsibility and playing one's adult roles effectively. Also, the adult may have attained little or no schooling.

Another definition, which has attracted the admiration of many adult education scholars, is that provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1975) in its effort to facilitate comparability of statistical data on education. It defines adult education as:

Out-of-school education and covers all organized educational activities provided for people who are not in the regular school and University system and who are generally fifteen or older. The 'regular school and university system' provides a 'ladder' by which children and young people may progress from primary schools through universities. It is designed and intended for children and young people, generally beginning at age five to

seven up to the early twenties... Adult education will also include a range of programmes, which may not be called 'education', but perhaps 'training', 'intention', of 'community development'¹ provided they are educational, in the sense that teachers, instructors or extension worker communicate knowledge, understanding, attitudes or skills to adult 'student' or 'clients' or 'target audiences', they should be regarded as 'adult education'. However, activities, sport or tourism without an educational purpose, conference or meetings, entertainments, advertising programmes or work camps with no explicit educational aims, would not be included (UNESCO, 1975).

A study of this definition emphasizes that whatever activity one undertakes in adult education programme be it learning guided by an instructor, or self-directed based on either full-time or part-time, must be in all its intent and purpose educational.

For the presenter, adult education is an enterprise that has the following important qualifications: -

- (a) An adult educates himself. The adult educator is not his teacher; he is only a facilitator of learning, adviser and helper.
- (b) The most important object of the education of the adult is to enable him to face the real conditions of life and solve his practical day- to-day problems.
- (c) For the adult, education is secondary and his profession is primary.

Definition of Political Development

Development, in general, refers to some kind of change and a growing complexity as well as an increasing capacity to carry out ever more complicated tasks and functions. Political development then suggests an increasing complexity for example, the development of bureaucracies dealing with welfare, education and government - and greater capacity for the state to enforce its will through political parties, policy, military forces and a civil service.

According to Pye (1966), there are three main characteristics of political development:

1. The capacity of a state to achieve national unity;
2. The development of political participation and democracy;
3. The development of effective political leadership.

The paper discusses the role of adult education in political development in Nigeria in the light of these three elements identified by Pye (1966).

Adult Education and National Unity

Nigeria is a polyglot state inhabited by people of diverse cultures and subcultures upon which in recent years have been overlaid broader distinctions. The ethnic and cultural differences which exist between groups and individuals are in themselves passive sources of disunity but may become serious threats to coherent and co-operative nation building and as has been witnessed in Nigeria in recent years, even to national stability when crisis situations emanate from other causes. Such situation which impel groups and individuals to fall back upon primordial or ethnic identities have tended to arise when one group believes it is subjected to unfair treatment, unequal opportunities or some other form of under-privilege. The strength of these primordial loyalties has been demonstrated in this country, which goes to testify the difficulty of eradicating such sources of discord or disunity and of creating strong national sense of attachment. Indeed, it is an acute malady, which plagues not only Nigeria, but also the continent of Africa as a whole. Really the differences between groups within a single nation are so enormous and so basic that recent policies of searching national integration, and the attempt to create a common national culture and a shared belonging identity, have been questioned and the alternative approach of looking for functional integration in which groups are bound together by common interest and consensus has been visualised as or likely to prove valid.

Whatever approach is adopted in the policy of nation building, adult education should be seen as a major instrument for attaining national unity, political stability, egalitarianism and preventing conflict situations. A justification for this stance is the fact that the crux of the matter is in the minds of the people and the hope has been that young people may be effectively socialized into the national culture or made aware of the desirability of maintaining the national political ideology through the adult education they may receive. The audience may ask the question, how? 'Conscientisation' is an

effective teaching-learning technique in the context of adult education. According to Freire (1972), the erstwhile Brazilian political fugitive who popularized the concept, it is a process of growing in awareness. It implies a commitment to "critical insertion into history" in order to create history. Therefore, Nigerians can be conscientised to look at themselves as a people in a "state" and not as different peoples in different societies. A national political framework that will form the content of this "conscientisation" should be the type, which is fashioned out from the people's cultural background. Certainly, if people are persistently fed with foreign political stuff, national disintegration, rather than national integration, will be the end result. And may be some day Nigerian political scientists and politicians will think of a concept like "NIGERIOCRACY" as a political ideology of the people, by the people and for the development of the people of Nigeria. However, the political role of adult education here is to achieve national unity.

Adult Education and Political Participation and Democracy

Nigeria is once again a democratic nation (after several years of military dictatorship) with presidential system of government based on universal adult suffrage. Thus, sovereignty rests with the people to whom the executive authority is ultimately accountable for all its decisions and actions through their elected representatives in the National Assembly. With the experience of the general elections and the working of democracy the national tendency of the vast majority of Nigerian citizens appears to be feeling that the elections being over and a new government ejected into office it would manage the affairs for them and they could leave it to get on with the task.

The members of the National Assembly have to deal with many complex and bewildering tasks both on the home front and in international matters. It is, no doubt, true that these problems are the immediate concern of the government and statesmen but that does not absolve the masses of their responsibility. Whatever else it might mean, democracy does not mean that any of its citizens can be contented to let other people to think for them or shoulder their social and political responsibilities and duties for them. People should understand that in a real democracy the responsibility of doing the thinking lies on each individual. As a citizen he must make his own contribution to the best of his ability and to the service of the nation.

Certainly, not everybody can be a member of the National Assembly. But we all can get to know something about the problems that member of these representative groups and the Federal and State Governments have to grapple with. Otherwise, how can we the electors make a balanced judgment on their performance of the task the nation has entrusted to them? It is necessary, therefore, to emphasize repeatedly that the success of democracy rests on an informed and intelligent opinion of the masses. Enlightened public opinion is not only a good thing for the citizens but also for government and every democratic institution from state legislatures down to the village peasants.

Another issue we must be clear about is that it is not only upon the government and those elected into political offices that the concern for the lives and liberties of the masses depends in a real democratic situation. It would be a hard thing for a country if it were. For it would mean concentration and control of power in the hands of a few which might ultimately lead to totalitarianism. We rightly fear the thought of totalitarianism in whatever form. But it is essential to know that unless we consciously plan for democracy and freedom, totalitarianism will definitely overwhelm us. If people really believe in the democratic way of life and if they are to attain this in all ramifications, it is necessary that every adult to play a creative and constructive role in the national-building (Aloa, 1990).

No nation with a goal for democracy can afford to have passive, indifferent, ignorant, and idle subjects. The members of the democratic society must be citizens, and the ideal of citizenship can only be achieved if the individual is armed with knowledge of the nature and functions of the state, the working of the democratic machinery that he must learn what his country is and what it stands in its past history and literature, and what is its place among the other countries of the modern world.

If we are to prevent disastrous drift to totalitarianism, or another era of military dictatorship and to place democracy on a solid foundation our task must be to help all the people of this nation to rise to creative and constructive citizenship, and that together in a spirit of co-operation and partnership the people may work out the democratic ideal in the whole structure of our country.

At present Nigeria lacks the ability to grapple with the task because of the impediment posed by the alarming rate of illiteracy and ignorance in the country. Hitherto, serious efforts have been directed toward the development and expansion of primary, secondary and tertiary education. Such efforts cannot in the nature of things do much to influence the course of events in a foreseeable future because they will affect the young ones, but without adult education. They will not touch anyone

older. Therefore, adult education can achieve what the formal school system cannot.

Adult education also makes provision for those who in their childhood were deprived of formal instruction. Therefore, the breadth of outlook and vision, which characterize the well-informed citizens, can only come through a steady and continuous process of adult education.

Effective political participation and the possibility of achieving a democratic nation imply that it is somebody's task in our society to create a widespread realization of responsibilities as well as of rights and to help people to equip themselves for the wide exercise of both. That job falls into the field of adult education, which should be considered as a priority in any educational structure. Trade Unions, the various co-operative societies, the local government authorities, agricultural extension officers, and many other free voluntary people's organizations in different fields while carrying out their administrative function can be mobilized to the general movement of educating the citizens.

Adult Education and Leadership Training

Although formal schools will continue to provide skilled manpower for leadership positions in all nations, it is important that leadership recruitment should not be limited to the very narrow strata of educational elite if rural development is to occur. The emphasis on recruitment of leadership from ranks of the population should be based upon recognized leadership skills and on paper qualifications. This is true whether development is based on democratic participation in decision-making on a grass-root level as was the intention in Tanzania (Collins, 1999), or the selecting of *animaleurs* as in the French speaking African countries focusing on *animation rural* (Loins, 1997). As Julius Nyerere (1968) once said, "There are two factors which are essential in the development of people. The first is leadership through education and the second is democracy in decision-making". Our adults, who never had the opportunity of formal schooling, can acquire leadership training through the numerous adult education programmes. Adult education must do this if it is to play a positive role in the historic task of rebuilding Nigeria. Through adult education those Nigerians who were educated under colonialism can undergo mental decolonisation, which is absolutely essential if Nigeria is to rediscover herself. For this reason the attitudes and political stands of the organizers of adult education is decisive.

Thus far it has been argued in this paper that adult education has the responsibility of achieving national unity, political participation and democracy, and leadership training which are essential elements in the political development of a country.

Certainly, there are specific methods that are indispensable in the mobilization of the people to participate in political development. These methods include the effective use of public media, drama, songs, role-playing, discussion, demonstration, visits, study circles and workshops. They are used to attract direct participation of community members in decision-making, planning and implementation. Participation is a vital aspect of political development. Thus, adult education can enhance the achievement of popular participation by providing continuous information in explicit terms through its various methods. Moreover, through these means practical information on communal living, political participation and leadership training can be imparted. Through the conscientisation approach the oppressed and illiterates can be helped to read, understand and control their environment.-

The effective utilization of adult education in the achievement of political development will depend on a number of conditions, which are being recommended in this paper.

Recommendations

1. Adult education should be an open and flexible system that incorporates less conventional media such as self directed learning, distance education, and new technologies. The learning opportunities through the media must be acknowledged. Through the use of these media, adult education can improve opportunity and provision of programmes to those who have traditionally not participated in it for whatever reasons.
2. For adults to learn to participate in political development, decision-making at their places of work and community, or becoming self-reliant and responsible citizens, participatory methods and approaches are imperative.
3. Adult education must be all-inclusive by involving people of all ages, genders, ethnic and social backgrounds. It should therefore take into consideration the various aspects of lives and identities of the individuals (e.g. citizens, parents, workers, educators, etc) and therefore needs to incorporate the needs of all adults in all their capacities.
4. Civic and political education activities should particularly focus on developing independent and critical judgment and enhancing the abilities needed by every person in order to adequately face the challenges affecting living and working conditions through

active participation in the management of socio-political affairs at all levels of the decision-making process.

Conclusion

Adult Education can be seen as offering more effective means of harnessing the total human resources of the nation, of removing some of the major internal sources of dissension and of improving the capacity of the people as a whole to participate in the management of their own affairs. One important implication of this is that of widening access to adult education and of making it available to all citizens, both old and young, and irrespective of people's states of origin. As a potent political tool, adult education should be manipulated in form and content to create appropriate attitude among the people. Repeated official pronouncements about the need to 'decolonise' education, to inculcate a spirit of co-operation, patriotism, nationalism, service and self-sacrifice and for traditional values can hardly be condemned at face value.

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