

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TEACHING AND RESEARCH IN ADULT EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

This paper discussed briefly the concept of adult education, the forms, principles, motivational factors for adult participation, and hindrances for adult participation in educational programmes followed. The paper equally discussed categories of research in adult education such as census research, the competencies of adult participants, adult learning process, and motivational factors for participation, teaching methods and materials and research in numeracy education. The study equally looked at the crisis surrounding the utilization of research results. Barriers to research utilization which border on individual commitment, organization, quality of research results, research result dissemination, environmental factor and lack of continuing education were discussed. Individuals networking, promoting accessibility, managing time, seminars and conferences, organizational support and ways of surmounting environmental factors are some of the way forward discussed in the discourse.

Key Words: Adult education, Teaching, Research practice, adult learners.

Adult education is an emerging discipline in the third world countries like Nigeria. The goal of adult education is to impart knowledge to the adult learners of different categories. Because of the different categories of adult learners, it takes different forms predominantly formal and non-formal. The art of teaching adult is referred to as andragogy. Adult education is formal when it is organized like a formal school system. Extension adult education programmes reach out to both literate and illiterate adults out-side formal setting, imparting knowledge of different forms and practices. Distance learning pattern of adult education transmits formally packaged knowledge to adults who are not privileged to have face to face in teaching and learning environment, through internet, radio, television and mails.

In all, adult education aims at up skilling adults within and outside their work places, through formal and non-formal settings. It is characterized by formal literacy classes, seminars, conferences, symposia and on-the-job training. It equally aims at providing life long education that prepares the individual for change and creates dynamic frame of mind in the individual (Dave, 1973).

To achieve the objectives of adult education, a lot of researchers engage in one form of research or the other, aimed at improving methods and practices of adult education. Year in year out researchers in institutions of learning and organizations in Nigeria and beyond kept sleepless night engaging in one form of research or the other, and the results are disseminated through appropriate media.

Unfortunately, the hard labour of the researchers end up on the pages of journals, in the libraries where they are frequently visited by students and researchers for little expansion. The purpose of research activities are defeated when they are not utilized by the teachers. Research utilization is expected to foster movement from innovation into practice (Azuka, 2010). Research utilization is vital in promoting education where educational practice continues to grow in complexity and educators at all levels, have greater responsibility and accountability for learning.

Many studies have shown that a gap exists between what is known and what is done in practice, despite an accumulating body of knowledge about the effectiveness of teaching profession (Grol and Grimshaw, 2003). The gap between research and adult education practice therefore, needs to be bridged

to enable the adult education instructors and lecturers who are in most cases non-professionals, part timers and not-well-educated have access to research findings for over all improved adult education in Nigeria.

The Concept of Adult Education

It may not be possible to give an in-dept meaning to adult education in this write-up. In any case, adult education can be defined as a practice in which adults engage in a systematic and sustained self-educating activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes or values (Sharan and Brockelt, 2007). In particular, adult education reflects a specific philosophy about learning and teaching based on the assumption that adults can and want to learn, that they are able and willing to take responsibility for that learning, and that learning itself, should respond to their needs (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2015).

Based on the above pre-supposition, adult education is therefore an instructional related support services for adults who are not enrolled in primary and secondary schools, or who might have dropped out of schools and as such lacked the educational foundation expected of literates. The adults whose inability to speak, read and write English language and or mother tongue, compute and solve problems constitute a substantial impairment of their ability to obtain, retain or function in jobs, in their family and the society. More so, these deficiencies disables them commensurate with their real ability to achieve their goals, and develop their knowledge and potentials. Thus, the adults are in need of programmes to help eliminate such inability and raise their level of education and self sufficiency. Adult education therefore, happens in many ways and in many contexts, just as all adults' live differ (Fenwick, Nesbit and Spencer, 2006). The major contexts in which adult learning takes place is categorized into three:- viz formal, informal and non-formal. The purpose of adult learning whether informal, formal or non formal is centered on vocational, social, political, recreational and indeed, overall self development (Spencer, 2006). For the fact that adult education is for the overall self development of the adult learners, they are self directed, matured, need oriented, problem centered and internally motivated (Knowles, 1984).

For adult education programme to achieve its objectives it must abide by the following principles:-

1. Adults cannot be made to learn. They will only learn when they are internally motivated.
2. Adults can only learn what they need to learn.
3. They learn by actively participating
4. Adult learning is problem based and these problems must be realistic.
5. Adult learning is affected by the experience each adult brings.
6. Adults equally learn informally.
7. Adults want information that will help them improve their situation and that of their children (Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2003).

Adults therefore, are motivated to engage in learning in expectation of certificates, promotions, job enrichments, need to retain old skills and learn new ones, need to adopt to job changes, and to motivate organizational goals. The best way therefore to motivate adult learners is enhancing their needs (Selwyn, Gorard, and Furlong, 2006).

All these principles and motivational factors notwithstanding, institutional, situational and dispositional, lack of time balancing, career and family demands, finances, transportation, confidence, interests, lack of information about opportunities to learn, scheduling problems, entrance requirement and problems with child care constitute obstacles to adult learners. Other obstacles are fear, shyness, ego, and stigma (Selwyn, Gerard and Furlong, 2006).

Research in Adult Education

Research in adult education is aggressively pursued through integrated efforts by UNESCO, international organizations and institutions that are engaged in different aspects of adult education. In the past years, many organizations, scholars and institutions were deeply involved in research in adult education with greater emphasis on literacy. The research activities were centered on accumulation of number of educated and uneducated adults; on drop out rates; on number of persons taking part in one kind of programme or another. This census kind of research was criticized by Kidd (1993) when he noted that:-

It is true, unfortunately, that a number of studies that have been called research in adult education have not been very profitable to any one. When the process becomes one of the counting noses, in the absence of any useful hypothesis, or any rigorous analysis of data collected, the efforts may be more frustrating than rewarding.

The criticism notwithstanding, such research studies are very essential in that, it built a base for further studies in adult education. Closely related to the quest for census research is research focused on the competencies of adults already participating in adult educational activities. These research areas have produced useful information for practicing adult educators. It has also left useful information gap concerning non-participants in adult education programmes (Tate, 1981).

Another area of research in adult education is the adult learning process. A lot of research studies have been going on in this aspect of adult education. For instance, Tate (1981) further added that adult learning process is a subject area of immense breath and diversity, including such important consideration as motivation, physical sensory and intellectual capacity; Educational achievements; Maturation, and the differences between child and Adult learners.

Another area of research concern is the motivational factors for the adult learners. The research on what motivates adult learners has intrigued researchers and adult educators working in every aspect of the field, in formal, non formal education, from literacy programmes to industrial education programmes. As Thomas (1981), puts it “motivation in adult education has two aspects; one is that which leads the adults to the learning activity in the first place and the other is that which makes him continue to attend and to exact effort in learning”. Most of the research findings in this area are grossly linked to Abraham Maslow’s (1968) theory of motivation that he grouped into stages of:-

Gratification of body needs;

Safety insurance against pain and danger of life;

Love, affection, warmth, acceptance “place in the group”

Self esteem, self respect, self confidence,

Feeling of strength and adequacy;

Self actualization, self fulfillment, self expression, use of one’s capacities to the most one is capable of being.

An extensive researched area in adult education is teaching methods and materials. Applications of pedagogical methodologies and materials in teaching adult learners have suffered abuse, neglect, and more damages than good. In view of this, research conducted by Mezirow, Darkenwald, and Knox (1975) revealed “high drop outs, prevalence of dysfunctional teaching methods, and the dearth of high quality instructional materials” in United States of America.

Apart from this research areas cited above, more research studies have been devoted to improved methods with particular emphasis on the use of distance learning, including correspondence and mass media, internet and group discussions and, on the areas of impact and effectiveness of these new technologies of which cannot be contained in this discourse.

Most current is a shift of research emphasis on numeracy education. Many organizations, like Adult Learners Special Group of Australia; Adult Numeracy Practitioners Network of United States of America; Mathematical Support Association of Britain; and Adult Learning Mathematics Forum (ALMF), emerged to further research on Adult Numeracy Education (Coben, 2006).

Summarily, both within and outside Nigeria, there are research efforts going on in different aspects of adult education, but utilization of these research results left nothing to write home about.

The Crisis of Research Applications

Effective practices of adult education in Nigeria and the world over demands strategies for extracting relevant information from many publications of current research reports. So also, the quality of information in adult education available determines the effectiveness of teaching and learning process.

So long as researchers continue to research and practitioners desire new methods of practice, the crisis of acceptability and applications of research must always arise. Acceptance and application of research results determine the success of adult education activities at all levels. Looking at the issue of application involves considering three questions: what the role of research is, has been in the past and what it ought to be (Hammensley, 2002). A resolution on these key questions determines the degree of acceptance and application of research findings in the teaching and learning process.

Another conflict zone is the issue of conceptualization. Researchers, by training and orientation engage in a lot of concepts and ideas that some times, appear unrealistic and beyond the comprehension of the practitioners who may not be versatile. As Fox (2000) puts it there is the tendency for researchers to see and understand the world at the conceptual level, and they are trained to enjoy working with cloudy concepts and ideas. He further stated that “practitioners have diametrically opposed view tending to... want studies that guide them through every day problems of practice rather than duchies that address broad areas of interest.

Arising from bourgeois and abstract concepts that characterize research is the fitness of research results in the classrooms and other adult learning programmes. This issue creates a crisis situation in that researchers often want to know “why” practitioners are not using results from educational studies in the classrooms, while the practitioners are asking “how” they are supposed to incorporate research findings into their everyday practice (Warby, Greene, Higgins and Lonvilt, 1999). By implication, application of research requires tutoring.

In addition, researchers and practitioners view the purpose of conducting research and methods for utilizing research differently. Researchers view research studies as efforts in improving efficiency in any discipline, while practitioners most often, view research as a more academic exercise in many cases for edification and professional growth. These conflicting views frustrate the zeal and commitment of practitioners in utilizing research results.

Furthermore, practitioners are frequently unsure of the validity of research, because they are not experienced in or comfortable with methods of determining which studies are valid and which are not. Often the validity of a study can be determined by the reputation of the source in which the research is published or by careful review of data collection and analysis, and procedure; but making these judgments require a fairly sophisticated understanding of research structure such as journal reputation (Gerston, 2001).

He further added that more complication is that highly respected people often have opposing views on very significant issues, which leaves practitioners confused and untrusting. Practitioners in the

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field continue to struggle with the uncertainty of research based information through out. The research community never settled for the best way for research to be conducted that would be easy for the practitioners to comprehend and purposefully apply the results without being confused or misled.

In conclusion, practitioners often believe that researchers could be doing more to make their work accessible and relevant to everyday issues, while other commentators argue for continued separation of research and practice. Hultman (1995), opined that:-

Some people consider that the researchers do not need to think of their work in terms of answers the questions thereby making research legitimate; instead researchers should view research as something that gives rise to new ideas, questions, old assumptions and contributes concepts that can be tools to better understanding every day problems.

There appears to be no simple answers to the best relationship and the means to bridging the gap between research and practice, leading to the question of how research is currently used by the practitioners and those who find research results useful.

Barriers to Research Utilization

Apart from the crisis highlighted above, there are some obvious factors that constitute impediment to research utilization. Such barriers are, individual, organization, the quality of research and the way the research results is communicated (Funk, Champagne, Wiese and Tornquist, 1991).

The barriers are itemized below as:-

1. At individual level, some practitioners are not committed to the profession. Some are part timers who look at the job as a means of making up income. They have lukewarm attitude towards the profession. Some of these practitioners are not familiar with the principles and methods of adult education. They lack competency and such do not care to look for current research results in adult education practice. The attitudes of these practitioners in Nigeria have a damaging effect on the practice and application of research results in adult education.
2. Organizations play a great role in utilization of research findings. Some organizations are apathetic to promoting adult education programmes. In Nigeria, it is only the government agencies that are engaged in adult education. Very few non governmental organizations promote adult education. It is only when an organization is engaged in adult education that it can provide access to research findings and application.
3. The quality of research determines utilization. There is very few breakthroughs in research in the field of adult education in Nigeria apart from students projects. One of them is functional literacy programme conducted by the university of Ibadan in 1970s. Most of the researches have nothing to reckon with, and end up in mushroom and poor quality journals that hardly reach the teachers of adults because of limited circulation.
4. The way the research results are communicated in Nigeria is short of space and time. There is a large gap in communication and understanding between the providers of research findings and those attempting to apply research based information (Tetax Center for Adult Literacy and Learning, 2003). The rapid growth of educational information all over the world demands that educationists and the practitioners in particular, cannot rely on knowledge acquired as students and must constantly update their knowledge for effective delivery of knowledge. Teaching is information intensive and lack of information on research is a great impediment to adult education. Internet has emerged as a formidable medium for information provision and exchange. According to Fox (2000), “practitioners want useful information, clear suggestions, and they want to know it immediately, right when they need them”.
5. Environment is another stumbling block to research utilization. The geographical setting of a country or community has influence on the access and utilization of research results. There are situations where adult education classes are organized in remote rural villages. There are instances

also where adult education is organized for the nomads. These are terrible situations that access to research results and information generally by the instructors is an uphill task.

6. Lack of continuing education. When the practitioners are not constantly updated in knowledge, decay and obsolescence always set in. Lack of training and retraining of the adult instructors using research results is a stumbling stone in research utilization.

A Way Forward to Facilitating Research Utilization

1. **The Individual Adult Teacher's Networking.** Osuafor (1999) wondered "if research findings in new techniques for effective teaching are ever made use of by classroom teachers". Ezema (2007), equally lamented that it is worrisome that teachers do not make any attempt to procure research findings; and worrisome too is the fact that majority of them do not know what journal is all about. Adult instructors who participate in research-related projects promote research utilization and are more likely than other instructors to apply research in practice. Practitioners need to be motivated and encouraged to attend seminars, conferences and access internet to abreast research results.

2. **Promoting access to Information.** For the fact that accessibility and quality of information have implications for efficacy of teaching, it is important that work place reference materials are provided; they should be current and user friendly. Teaching and learning would be in jeopardy when necessary information and teaching materials are absent or in short supply. Institutions and organizations that provide adult educational programmes need to make research results available to the instructors.

3. **Managing time, Seminars and Conferences.** Seminars and conferences are avenue for showcasing research findings. Time and resources need to be created by service providers for adult teachers to attend seminars and conferences to update their knowledge. Seminars and conferences are adult education programmes on their own that provide enabling environment for adult teachers to interact, discuss, and share views on research findings and their application in the classroom situations. Continuing professional training has been promoted as one way to bridge the gap between research and practice (Felch and Scanlon, 1997).

4. **Organizational Support.** Organizational characteristics which include size, location and centralization of decision making have been associated with research utilization; but the conclusions about the importance of specific variables are inconsistent, perhaps because their effects vary in different settings. Programmes intended to improve research utilization have been most successful when administrative support is available (Royle, Blythe, Boblin-Cummings, 1997). Organization has a vital role in promoting utilization of research findings by encouraging, motivating and provision of necessary materials and support.

5. **Environment:** Environment is an impediment to research results utilization. However, with other factors put together, the issue of environment can be overcome. When friendly and educational environment is adequately created, teaching and learning can take place. Distance is not also a barrier when communication is positively proactive.

Conclusions

The ultimate wish and believe of the society is that researchers and adult education practitioners and instructors would improve current knowledge and educational practice. Even though the fact remains that research has not lead to wide spread changes in adult education practices and persistence practice problems, still research is filtering into the practice. The practice has not indeed changed very much and practice has not equally changed the adult learners very much, but with the strategies proposed, hope is not lost that the impact will soon be felt to uplift adult education in Nigeria.

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