

**ADULT AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION  
IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: COPING WITH COVID-19 ERA THROUGH  
DISTANCE LEARNING.**

**ELEBERI, Godwin ; ECHZU, Benjamin C. & AMAIKE, Sunny C. Ph.D**

Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education,  
School of Adult, Non-Formal & Special Education,  
Federal College of Education (Tech), Omoku, Rivers State, Nigeria  
Corresponding Email : [bennychezu@gmail.com](mailto:bennychezu@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

*Human society has evolved through various stages of development and changes. The ability to cope anchors on the level of knowledge available and fervent effort made for its application. This paper, focuses on the concept of adult and non-formal education, and its functions to the society. It also highlights effect of COVID-19 on global education practices. It further X-rays the potency of distance learning in the era of COVID-19 pandemic. It concludes that distance learning is indispensable in adult and non-formal education practice in 21<sup>st</sup> century. The paper suggested among others the provision of necessary information communication technologies to enhance learning process and adequate supervision of distant learning programmes to enhance standard.*

**Keyword:** COVID-19, ICT, Learning, Standard living.

**Introduction**

Education is an inevitable tool for social and economic development of every society. No wonder countries consciously articulate policies for the enhancement of their educational programmes, in a similar vein, adult and non-formal education as a part of general education, anchors laudable activities which brings about positive transformation in manpower requirement across the globe. According to Gbenro (2010) adult and non-formal education plays significant roles in all facets of life. It can rescue majority of people from the shackle of ignorance, disease and some *raison d'etre* and add to development. It is however disheartening to see the level of neglect and disparage on the roles of adult and non-formal in a dynamic society. Nzeneri (2008) in emphasizing the potency of adult education notes that, it is in adult education that greatest emphases are placed on life-long education, education as a process and agent of liberation, a tool for self and national development, cultural awareness and integration and for conscientization and group dynamism.

The educational system of the world was meted with a devastating blow on the outbreak of Corona Virus (COVID-19) pandemic in the later part of 2019. The virus was said to have emanated from Wuhan, China. However, COVID 19 was first recorded in Nigeria in March, 2020 which paralyzed socio-economic activities including adult and non-formal education programmes in Nigeria. All schools were compulsorily shut down as a means of curtailing the spread of the highly contagious disease. United Nations (2020) posits that the COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of educational systems in history affecting nearly

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1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries of the world. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 percent of the world's student population, up to 99 percent in low and lower-middle income countries.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Adult**

Understating adult education require a beam on the concept of adult. There are myriad of definition of adult by different scholars. The parameter for defining adult differs from one society to another. While some consider adulthood through mental maturity, others identify adulthood through chronological criteria or physical maturity. Nzeneri (2008) views adult as one who is physically and psychologically matured and is socially, economically and politically responsible. A brief consideration of the above definition suggests that an adult has certain roles to perform in the society. For instance, the physical maturity confers on adult the responsibility to become a wife or husband. On that note, such persons are important agents of socialization at the family level and society at large. More so, he actively participates or involves in economic activities to meet the daily need of the family. Corroborating the above. Houle and Bown in Eheazu et al., (2013) posit that adult is a person who has achieved full physical development and is expected to have the right to participate as a responsible home maker, worker and member of a society. Responsibility in the context above implies involvement in activities that will meet the expectations of the individual, group or the society at large.

To bring harmony to the various definitions of adult, UNESCO (1976) recommends that a person is an adult if the society which he belongs recognizes him as such. It must be noted that the adult is faced with enormous responsibilities as he/she assumes different statuses with attendant roles, from time to time which requires education to accomplish. It is on these premises therefore that adult education becomes indispensable to provide lifelong learning experience and distance learning to provide instructional opportunities with spate of COVID-19 restriction.

### **Adult Education**

Adult education is a complex concept. Its array of activities gives different scholars the liberty to define it in a particular perspective according to their basis. However, few definitions will be considered. In the view of Mbalisi (2014),

“Adult education is seen as any educative and purposeful learning activities organised for adults in order to expose them to how to survive in life by providing them with needed activities, knowledge, competence, information and skills to perform maximally”.

The above succinctly captures the adult as subset of the society who is confronted with problem-solving situations. They need to be abreast with the requisite knowledge and relevant skills to proffer solutions. In a related view, Iherijika (2007) citing the initial definition of International Congress on Comparative Study on Adult Education, asserts that adult education is a process of learning by which people who no longer attended school on a regular and full-time basis (unless full-time programmes are especially designed for adults) undertake sequential and organised activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, understanding or skills appreciation and attitude or for

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the purpose of identifying and solving personal or community problems. Adult education spans beyond mere literacy effort as it is in most developing countries. Those who have acquired literacy skills cannot be complacent of the need to improve. It is on this premise that adult education is remarked as a learning process that:

Is multidimensional in nature and offers second chance to persons who never had educational opportunities. It is a process that allows everyone to learn without exception. It is a continuous learning process for all individuals irrespective of their educational attainment in the society. In adult education there is much more that every person can learn or acquire to improve their skills, knowledge, attitude as well as professional capacities that were not known earlier on in life. The main objective of adult education is to make individuals relevant to situations in any given society (Nyerere, 1973).

The above remarks by the former president of Tanzania, Nyerere., has clearly indicated that adult education is not for a selected sect of people or only matured adults. The youths are not excepted to adult education activities. Therefore, adult education is an articulate educative activity organised to acquire relevant attitude, skills or knowledge to solve identified or perceived problems.

At this point, it will be pertinent to highlight the widely accepted definition of adult education given during the UNESCO-Nairobi 1976 conference. This definition of adult education, according to Ugwu and Mbalisi (2016) is:

The entire body of organised educational process, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in Schools, Colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich, their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitude or behaviour in the two-fold perspective of full personal and development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development.

The above UNESCO definition has shown that the review of adult education is considerably wide hence its relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be overemphasized based on the above definitions; it is therefore deducible to advance as follows that:

- It activities must be properly organised
- The content must be educative
- The Clients must be an agent of positive change through improved abilities, knowledge and skills which results from participation in adult education programme.

### **Benefits of Adult Education**

The essence of learning is for improvement to build better capacity to handle issues. To this end, the benefits of adult education according to UNESCO (2020) includes:

- Equipping people with the necessary capabilities to exercise and realize their rights and take control of their destinies.
- Promoting personal and professional development, thereby supporting more active

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engagement by adults with their societies, communities and environments.

- Fostering, sustainable and inclusive economics growth and decent work prospects for individuals and
- Alleviating poverty, improving health and well-being and contributing to sustainable learning societies.

### **Non-formal Education**

Non-formal education is another silent learning medium that drives the economy of any country through manpower development, it is an education process outside the formal education in four walls of the school. Harbison in Ngwu (2006) contends that:

Probably no country has ever made a complete inventory of all non-formal learning programme conducted by its many public and private agencies. There are no reliable estimates of either capital or recurrent expenditure allocation to them. But in the aggregate more people are exposed to non-formal learning activities than to formal schools.

Non-formal education encompasses series of activities targeted at providing necessary information, skill and training for people who desire to improve their productive capacity for better performance. Nzeneri (2013) sees non -formal education as a systematic enterprise that are usually organised outside the formal school system in which admission criteria, staff content, media, time units and facilities are adapted to help maximize the attainment of learning objectives. It is a flexible pattern of learning that takes place in anywhere. Non-formal education programme can take place in community town hall, market place, church premises etc.

### **The Purpose of Adult and Non-Formal Education**

The practice of adult and non-formal education in Nigeria is guided by the National Policy on Education which stipulated its purposes. The Nation Policy on Education (2013) has the purpose of adult and non-formal education as follows:

1. functional basic education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who drop out of their early education. The target groups are those who are unable to have access to the conventional educational system and requiring other forms of educational programmes to cater for their particular/peculiar needs and circumstances. They include the nomads, street children, the illiterate and semi-literate people.
2. remedial and life-long education for youths and adults who did not complete secondary education; and
3. in-service, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills.

The above goals are laudable expectations articulated by the Federal Government of Nigeria for adult and non-formal education. An x-ray of the above reveals that adult and non-formal education is pivotal in the journey of the country, towards a virile and economically viable nation. It is evident that the conventional educational system cannot cater for all facets of our nation's developmental needs. To this end, the task of adult and non-formal education to attain the above stated purposes can be contained by restriction posed by COVID-19 with

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emergence of new variants. Learning through distance education which is practiced based on physical spatial separation between the teacher and learners become indispensable.

### **What is Distance Learning ?**

Distance learning is a study practice where there is absence of face to face encounter between the teacher and the learner. It is a learning process that encourages the use of various communication media for learning without physical contact with the teacher. It can also be used interchangeably with distance education and for purpose of this paper, distance education will be used. This is in consonance with the view of Barikor (2013) that the concept of distance education is a generic term which subsume others term like correspondence education or correspondence study, distance technology. These are nomenclature ascribed to the concept in different countries:

Distance education, according to Peter in Barikor (2003) is a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitude in an individual or group of individuals in a manner that rationalized the application of decision of labour and organisational principles as well the extensive use of technical media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching materials which makes it possible to instruct credit numbers of students at the same time where ever they live. It is an industrialized form of teaching and learning process. Distance education has been used for several years in several forms. It considers the convenience of the learner without comprise to the standard and quality of delivery. There is the teacher or instructor at one end, medium and learner. The essence is provision of learning opportunities to different needs. The success of distance education is anchored on certain basic requirements. Barikor (2003) further identified the basic requirement of distance education to include:

- Distance education depends on a great deal of technology, technical know-how and a steady supply of power.
- Well prepared learner-centered material.
- Efficient and time distribution of learning materials, i.e. an efficient delivery system.
- A good learner support system, to provide materials, feedback and counseling and
- Good administration of the learning and assessment process as well as the monitoring and evaluation for quality control.

### **Distance Learning Tools and COVID-19**

The basic requirements above are the recipe for a productive teaching and in distance education. Picciano (2002) classified distance learning technologies into:

#### **i.Print Technologies**

These are the print materials which are available for teaching and learning process in distance education. It is an age long practice where study materials are made available for learning and mostly disseminated through correspondences. Presently, there are textbooks on electronic media which are provided for the learners. This practice keeps the instructor and learner away from face to-face encounter.

**ii.** This form of technology is only voice communication. It is carried out through audio cassettes, audio conferencing and the radio. Though, the audio cassettes lack interactive feature between the instructor and the learner, it is still very useful as instruction can be systematically planned or designed for the learner. Audio conferencing can accommodate interaction between instructor and students which the other audio technologies do not possess. For example, phone can be used

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for audio conferencing. Audio technologies lack graphic presentations in Nigeria. However, radio has been used for adult literacy programmes or mass education. It is not expensive to use. It is accessible and affordable to all classes of people. In this COVID-19, with restriction on accommodating large number of people in a given place, learning programmes can take place via listening to radio at a specified time.

### **iii. Video Technologies**

The importance of image in teaching and learning is so great. A lesson or an instruction taught with audio is not as interesting and captivating as video instruction. In distance education, video is a means of connecting the teacher and learner even with physical distance between them. There are several video technologies available for distance learning. These include video cassettes, television and video conferencing which are capable of transmitting audio, video and data. Saba in Dokubo (2013) posits that contemporary technology has introduced integrated systems that provides two-ways synchronous communications with voice, image, and file-transfer and screen-share capabilities. The digital technology provides learning instructions through desktop for individuals at different places. The zoom and Skype are topical digital technologies used in this regard.

### **iv. Computer Technologies**

The use of computer technologies in distance learning across the globe today is increasing tremendously. Computer- assisted instruction (CAT) and Computer -based education (CBE) are examples of technologies which are provided to enhance teaching and learning activities. Another form of computer technologies is the internet. Distance learning instructions via the above technologies can be used to carried out synchronous instructions at a specific time. The mode of asynchronous instructions programme allows learning at different times, hence recognizing learners' individual challenges.

### **v. Blending Technologies**

No single technology is perfect for delivery of instructions; this is because education has it flaws. Hence, a combination of different technologies provides the learner the leverage to use the most cost effective to maximize benefit. Picciano (2002) argues that educators need not take a purist attitude and commit to the idea that all distance learning process must be constructed via one technology. On the contrary, common sense and good planning dictate that the most effective technologies should be used, and in combination if need be. It is penitent to add that the classifications of distance learning or education technology stated above are not absolute. There are other classifications which may rearrange the above technologies in different ways. Be that as it may, the interpretation of each as it affects distance learning in COVID-19 era is not demeaned.

## **Conclusion**

Adult and non-formal education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is gaining momentum. It is inevitable in creating required consciousness in individuals and group towards liberating them from ignorance and low standard of living. But the outbreak COVID-19 and consequent shock truncated facilitation of learning activities. The effort made to compulsorily close down teaching and learning process gave impetus to an alternative means of teaching and learning without converging learners in a particular place. To that extent, distance education brings an opportunity where learning can take place without endangering or posing any risk to lives of people. COVID-19 though horrendous, it has provided an avenue for educational planners to strengthen the frontier of distance learning process posterity.

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### **Recommendations**

This paper, therefore recommended as follows:

1. Government should ensure that institutions provide necessary information communication technologies for digitization of teaching and learning process.
2. Monitoring agencies should adopt as a part of accreditation of programmes, availability of ICT units in various department of tertiary institutions.
3. Quality of programmes in distance learning should be adequately supervised by the quality assurance unit of each institution to enhance standard.

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