

THE RELEVANCE OF ADULT EDUCATION IN A CONTEMPORARY WORLD: THE IMPLICATIONS

Ekuri, K. A¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-6880-6495

Betieng, P. A², Andong, H. A³ & Eyam S. O⁴.

1 & 4 Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education,
Akamkpa. Cross River State. Nigeria

2 & 3 Department of Continuing Education and Development Studies,
University of Calabar, Calabar.
Kellyekuri8@gmail.com

Abstract

The Provision of relevant educational services is the concern of researchers in the contemporary society. This paper conceptual paper argues that adult education is relevant only if it meets the personal and societal aspirations of adult learners. It further maintains that such relevant education is necessary for addressing contemporary national and global challenges. However, despite the laudable goals and objectives of adult education, there are usually problems in the implementation process. The methodology adopted was the Content Analysis Format. The paper however affirms that adult education remains a significant weapon for solving global challenges. It recommended that educational– stakeholders should effectively fund and manage this sector of education in order to contain the severe global changes affecting humanity.

Keywords: Education for relevance, adult education, contemporary world.

Introduction

Education is an indispensable tool in the hands of every nation to achieve national development and is recognized by the Federal Republic of Nigeria as “an instrument par excellence” (FGN, 2012). Education for relevance refers to the adequacy of learning opportunities for students of all types. Such an education system must take into account local traditions and institutions, positive cultural practices, belief systems, and community needs. It prepares students nationally and internationally for

a positive future in society. It is directly related to the quality of what is learned, how it is learned and the effectiveness of the learning process. The implication is that any educational policy, in order to achieve its stated aim and goal, must have personal relevance and relevance to life.

When learning is connected to a student's interests, aspirations, and life experiences, it is personally relevant. When integrated effectively into the classroom, personal relevance can increase student motivation to learn, engagement with what is being taught, and even retention and recall of learned knowledge. Different forms of personal relevance can include individual choices, product choices, diverse content, and cultural connections. Similarly, education is said to be relevant to life when learning is connected to real-world issues, problems, and contexts outside of the school environment. It equipped students with skills and knowledge to use throughout their lives in different educational, professional and social contexts. As with personal relevance, life relevance can improve engagement, motivation, and learning acquisition. Some representative forms of life relevance may include skill acquisition, current events, practical context, career aspirations, and community ties. Adult educators are expected to use a variety of educational strategies to improve the teaching of relevant concepts and skills.

The question of the relevance of adult education has focused on the role and purpose of adult education for individuals and societies. The authors of this article argue that adult education should serve both individual and collective goals, such as the preservation of cultural knowledge, the creation of an ideal state, which informs adult and future citizens, produces and energizes human capital for industry, promotes social development and reaffirms the important role of adult education and training in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit 2016 (Langer Research Associates, 2016). Relevant adult education should produce people who work for international unity, who promote social development, promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth, protect the environment and contribute to the eradication of poverty and hunger both locally and internationally. Thus, it is necessary to answer the following questions; Who is an adult and what is adult education? Is the provision of adult education personally and life relevance? Are the objectives of adult education still relevant in the contemporary society?

Adult Education

Adult education is said to be relevant only and only if it remains a veritable tool in transforming the world. Relevant adult education is the most powerful weapon which can be used to change the world (Nelson Mandela, 2013). Erasmus Mundus (2021) noted that it is a critical element in addressing challenges pertaining to employment, research and innovation, climate change and energy education and combatting poverty. It is acknowledged universally to contribute to making the world safer, promoting gender equality, reducing the unproductive world population and mitigating global changes.

There are varied contextual definitions provided by different scholars in the field of adult education. The philosophical underpinning of most definitions is 'education provided to the adult' (Ibeh, 2008; Wildemeersch, and Olesen, 2012 and Barros, 2012). This Raised an issue of who an adult is. For the purpose of this paper, an adult is seen as one who is functional in society after taking cognisance of the sociological, physical, historical, psychological political chronological and biological concepts of adulthood. Correspondingly, two key elements have been pointed out in the definition of adult education given by Nzeneri (2010) viz responsibility and maturity. The author maintained that a person who is physically and psychologically mature, and at the same time being socially, economically, politically, culturally and environmentally responsible is an adult. This definition give rise to a number of questions in a curious mind among which include.

1. Is there any need for adult to be educated if such an adult is already functional in the society?
2. If education according to Emile Durkheim (1993) is the transmission of shared societal values, can education be used as a tool to change unhealthy societal norms which are transmitted by adult communities?
3. Having seen as functional socially, politically, culturally and otherwise, how can adult education fine-tune individuals to cope with modern changes and demands?
4. What benefit is adult education to the teeming youth population?

These questions are inexhaustible as long as there is no consensus definition of who an adult is. Onyenemezu (2012). defines adult education as the education (formal, informal and non-formal) given to

any person regarded as an adult by society in order to socially, economically, and culturally improve and empower him/her, so that the person will be able to contribute meaningfully as a useful and acceptable member of society. It is education based on the needs of the adult. Additionally, Merriam, Sharau and Brockett, (2007) maintained that adult education is the process whereby adults engage in systematic and sustained learning activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes or values. The contemporary definition of adult education as perceived by the author in this paper was presented by Houle (1964) cited in Igbo, (2008). The author defines adult education as the process by which men or women either alone or in groups attempt to improve themselves by bringing about changes in their understanding, skills or sensitivities.

The content of the above-cited definitions portrays the fact that adult education proffers solutions to contemporary human problems. In addition, this type of education proposed a great deal in the areas of socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental prospects to people. Internationally, Hamilton and Hillier (2006), Tett and Crowther (2012), Noted that the field of adult education has changed tremendously in the modern society, hence the general consensus being shifted from education of adults to lifelong learning; emancipation to empowerment, with the introduction of terminologies such as standards, skills, competitiveness, employability, etc. ((Wildemeersch and Olesen 2012; Barros 2012). Few points are noted from the definition provided by Onyenemezu (2012) which necessitate the shift in the concept used to define adult education, among which include; *first*, adult education could be formal, informal or non-formal; but then, the possibility of recognising one who receives informal or semi-formal education as educated in Nigeria is a doubting issue. *Second*, resources available for teaching an adult in formal setting is an issue of consideration. *Third*, adult education lack's structure, hence implementation difficulty is certain. *Fourth*, identifying the need of adult to design an education system based on need may be unrealistic. Be it as it may, delving into the definition of adult education will raise more unanswered questions. Moreover, let's consider some prospects of adult education in our contemporary society.

Provision of employers in diverse sectors of the economy with qualified, skilled, and sustainable manpower to service the economy.

This implies that adult education is dynamic, and the intensity of dynamism should be tantamount to the global nature of the economy. The provision of sustainable manpower connotes the fact that adult education should be able to produce skilled human resources all the time in any sector. This is needed as most adults are already the implementers of policies in all sectors of the economy. The adult community occupy the production sector of the economy, setting the pace for the youth to emulate. It also noted that the education of the child is futuristic, while adult education is contemporaneous. In addition to production, the supply of such manpower today and tomorrow without any shortage and having no large excesses is also inherent in the provision of sustainable manpower. It may be on this note that Omolewa (1985:1) quoted the onetime director-general of UNESCO thus:

It is not the children of today who hold the present destiny of Africa in their hands, it is the adults. So, it is only by establishing effective communication with the adult population, by helping them to adjust to a rapidly changing world, that an immediate impact can be made on urgent problems of society and essential progress to be brought about.

Key objectives of Adult Education in the contemporary society

The objectives of adult and non-formal education as stipulated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) includes:

- i. To provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or (dropouts)...These include the nomads, migrant families, the disabled, and the disadvantaged gender.
- ii. To provide functional and remedial education for those who did not complete secondary education.
- iii. To present education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills.

- iv. To provide in-service, on-the-job, vocational and professional trainings for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills, and
- v. To give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural, and civic education for public enlightenment.

Globally, adult education is designed with both short and long-term expectations. In the short run, it is expected that adult education should be able to develop people's ability to think critically, act autonomously and responsibly; strengthen the ability to shape and face developments in a given economy and the world of work; contribute to the creation of a knowledge economy, in which every individual has the opportunity to learn and participate fully in the processes of sustainable development and to strengthen solidarity between people and communities; promote peaceful coexistence and human rights; foster resilience in young and older adults and raising awareness of environmental protection. whereas there is hope that in the long-run, adult education should equip adults with the skills they need to practice, realize their rights and take charge of their destiny; promote personal and professional development, thus supporting a more active adult engagement in their societies, communities and working environments; promotes sustainable and inclusive economic growth and decent work opportunities for people. Therefore, becoming a crucial tool to alleviate poverty, improve health and well-being, and contribute to sustainable learning societies (UNESCO, 2015).

The functionality of the laudable national and international goals and objectives of adult education here stated are hanged on key main areas namely; policy, governance, financing, participation, inclusion and equity, and quality. The national policy on education (FGN, 2004) has already developed comprehensive, inclusive, and integrated policies for adult learning and education in its various forms. The policy addressed learning in a wide range of spheres, including the economic, political, social, cultural, technological, and environmental. Doubtably, the functionality of such a policy to enhance the provision of relevant adult education is not debatable (Ukwuaba, 2015; Nzeneri, 2008; Fasakun 2006; Onyenemezu, 2012).

The loopholes found in the policy by the current researchers included the fact that it fails to recognize the importance of all relevant

stakeholders, including, public authorities, academia, civil society organizations, and the private sector as partners in policy development and provision of relevant adult education. The flexibility of the policy to adapt to future needs, issues and challenges are also questionable.

For the provision of personal and societal relevance to adult education, the policy should be able to raise awareness, through legislation, institutions, and sustained political commitment. Take steps to provide information, motivate learners and direct them to relevant learning opportunities to explore the wider benefits of adult literacy, learning, and adult education to society, including through the collection, analysis, and dissemination of effective policies and practices to show, the wider benefits of literacy, adult learning and education to society, such as social cohesion, health and well-being, community development, employment and environmental protection as aspects of inclusive, equitable and sustainable development.

Governance structures have been clearly defined in national education policies without implementation. There is a lack of established mechanisms for the management of adult learning institutions in both formal, informal and non-formal settings. Leaving the delivery and management of adult learning to the private sector. Also, Nigeria lacks an enabling environment for good governance in the provision of adult education, resulting in the neglect of relevant actors in adult education and training from public authorities, civil society organizations, civil society, and the private sector (such as ministries, student associations, local authorities, media, research and academic institutes, volunteer groups, international, trade unions, and regional organizations), including those organizing teaching and learning processes and validating competencies at local, regional and national levels.

In Nigeria, the financing of general education has suffered a drastic setback with very minimal percent of the national budget allocating to the entire education sector. In addition, financial misappropriation also serves as a hindrance to the utilization of the limited financial resource in a sustainable, efficient, effective, democratic, and accountable way. Thus, it can be said that the fund so mobilize and allocated to the provision of adult education are not in tandem with national needs, hence implementation setbacks.

To ensure participation, inclusion, and equity, adult education programme is expected to provide quality learning opportunities to all

women and men of diverse social, cultural, linguistic, economic, educational, and other backgrounds. To achieve this, it is expected that mechanisms should be set in place to address the issues of accessibility, autonomy, equity, and inclusion. This implies that for adult education to be personally relevant, all adults irrespective of their status must have full access and participation in learning activities devoid of discrimination on any grounds, including age, gender, ethnicity, migrant status, language, religion, disability, illness, rurality, sexual identity or orientation, poverty, displacement, imprisonment, occupation or profession. However, the effectiveness of this policy is only found in pages of literature.

Looking at the provision of education in the Nigerian context, it isn't difficult to understand the mawkishness of many educators who are apprehensive about the prospect of making adult education relevant to an increasingly diverse populace. To complicate matters further, there is little consensus on what it means to make adult education relevant, thus, emphasis is placed on general education delivered only in the classroom when education for relevance is mentioned. Apparently, not everyone agrees that adult education should be relevant, or even can be, and such disagreements often underscore the uncomfortable fact that even among educationists, there is considerable disagreement about the purposes of adult education and who an adult is, while others limit it to adult literacy, some conceptualize it as on-the-job training, and differing conceptualization goes on and on (Nnazor, 2005, Adeninoye, 2002, Zuofa, 2009)

Problems arise when adult educational relevance is framed to focus solely on society's broader agendas at the expense of individual goals and interests. Undoubtedly, most educators have recognised the need for adults and society alike to acknowledge the value of education beyond merely addressing economic needs (Pryor et al., 2012). The curriculum must be relevant and based on individual cultural backgrounds and personal experiences, and provide adults with opportunities to engage in authentic tasks that matter in the world of work.

For adult learning to be relevant, educators and policymakers must first consider the core issues to which policy, curriculum and instruction need to be relevant. Focus content should be personally significant for the adult learners, e.g., in relation to their cultural

experiences, goals and interests (NRC, 2003). Adult education must also be relevant to career aspirations. However, as unemployment increased over the years, people's belief in the relative importance of career preparation grew. Indeed, adult learners increasingly support personal and intellectual development goals, such as exploring interests and developing an appreciation for new ideas (Eagan et al., 2017).

Another conceptual problem is to determine how adult education is viewed as relevant, i.e to clarify the nature of the relevance relationship. Also, there should be a clear distinction between applied and conceptual relevance, with the former indicating that the knowledge acquired can be used in a specific application context and the latter that the knowledge fits or relates to other knowledge schemes (Albrecht and Karabenick, 2015). Questions about the relevance of adult education have been unanswered to date, raising concern and some controversy among adult educators and researchers.

While it is important to emphasize the value of adult education policy for holistic and sustainable development, it is also wise to acknowledge the various sources of systemic barriers within adult learning systems that could hamper the design, development and delivery of quality and relevant adult education. Even the best policies can be undermined by systemic constraints such as poor governance, insufficient stakeholder consultation in the decision-making process, lack of appropriately qualified teaching staff, inadequate physical facilities and insufficient funding for teaching and learning materials, among others. Another area of challenge in the provision of relevant adult education is negotiating contextual constraints.

Re-Engineering Adult Education for Relevance.

The emergence of the migration crisis, demographic changes, cultural change, wars, activities of terrorist groups, political instability, global change, globalisation, and digital economy among others required a number of educational interventions, especially for adults who prove to be the leaders and builders of today. It is expected that any educational services provided should be personally relevant in terms of connecting each learning opportunity to the learner's interest, life experience and aspiration, choices and cultural connections. Adults are already saddled with occupational and family issues, hence, all effort in proving them with an education which is not relevant to their needs at the moment

seems worthless. This means that adult education policy should be flexible enough for adult educators. On the other, adult educators should be well vested with the concept of curriculum adaptation in other to adapt them to the need of an individual adult.

Similarly, adult education should be relevant to life by connecting what is being taught connected to real-world issues, dilemmas and contexts outside a particular learning environment.

This implies that such education should be re-engineered to equip adult learners with skills and knowledge needed in different educational, professional and social contexts. Adult education is life relevant when it is pitched towards solving the problem of injustice, deprivation and oppression which in turn will bring peace and harmony among adult members of the country. It is expected that such education will serve as a tool for solving current problems of kidnapping, youth restiveness, indiscriminate bombings in the country, reduction of stereotyping and prejudices within the populace, contributing to cultural exchange, language learning and generally improving the quality of life.

Without adequate financing, provision of relevant adult education will continue to be a mirage. This this end, various source of finance for the provision of adult education should be visited, and mechanisms need to be set in place to ensure that adequate finance is being allocated to the adult education sub-sector of education.

Recommendations

In spite of the remarkable objectives of adult education which have not been achieved, this education should be repackaged to excessively lift the adults into the position they can respond positively to global changes and restore human security and progress through the following channels.

1. The adult educators and learners should have adequate relevant digital literacy and skills
2. Adult education should promote and intensify teaching and learning in a culture of peace and harmony
3. Environmental adult education should be designed to be able to mitigate the consequences of the climate change crisis
4. The open and distance learning component of adult education should comprehensible be able to cater for the educational needs of refugees and internally displaced persons

5. Education stakeholders should massively expand the scope of generating revenues that will adequately finance all segments of the adult education programmes

Summary/Conclusion

This paper argues that the provision of education through setting up unimplementable policies is not relevant in contemporary society due to the emergence of national and global issues. This paper critically explains who an adult is and the controversies surrounding the concept of adulthood and adult education. The authors argue that an individual who is considered in a given society as an adult can be regarded as such, and that any education provided to such an individual in whatever form it may take can be regarded as adult education. Like General Education, Adult Education can only attain its stated goals and objectives only if it is made relevant to adult learners personally and the entire society in which such an adult belongs including the workplace environment. The authors also call for flexibility in adult education policies and training in curriculum adaption for adult learners.

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