

## **STRENGTHENING ADULT EDUCATION AS A PUBLIC ENDEAVOUR AND COMMON GOOD**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Adult education is a potent vehicle that can drive national development in Nigeria, and entails educational programmes that caters for the diverse needs and interests of adult citizens. Adult education is paramount in facilitating inclusiveness in education, as it provides opportunity for all learners, irrespective of age, class, academic standing, ethnicity, religion and political orientations, to acquire the attitudes, skills, knowledge and experiences for active participation in community and national development, and for self-actualisation. This paper examined the essence of adult education as a common good and the challenges confronting the discipline especially in Nigeria. The paper also suggests strategies for strengthening adult education in Nigeria. It concludes that governments at all levels, and concerned stakeholders of education in Nigeria, should continuously fund and support measures, and programmes aimed at strengthening adult education in the country.

**Keywords: Essence; Challenges; Strategies, Strengthening; Adult education, Common good, Nigeria.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education is of great significance for the development of man in all ramification, as it is a means through which citizens attain self-actualisation (Seya, 2014); it is a force that brings about positive changes, and is vital for national growth and development (Boyi, 2013). Rajaj and Chiv (2009) assert that it is through education that nations' sustainability and stability is ensured. Individuals in the society, acquire the requisite skills, experiences, attitudes and knowledge through either the formal or the informal educational settings and apparatuses therein. According to Adeyemo (2013), education is a valuable tool for fighting ignorance, disease, squalor and poverty. Babalola and Ayeni (2009) view education as an investment that is crucial for the advancement of the country while also fostering the development of each individual citizen. Subrahmanian (2002) asserts that it is a fundamental right that should not be denied whatsoever for individuals (children, youths and adults) who are keen to learn.

Important structural variables (demographic decline and labour market changes) have significantly raised demand for adult education and expanded its significance in social development (Cedefop, 2010; European Commission, 2013). Taking these trends into account, the European agenda for adult learning aims to "improve the opportunities for adults, regardless of gender or personal or family circumstances, to access high-quality learning opportunities at any time in their lives, in order to promote personal and professional development, empowerment, adaptability, employability, and active participation in society" (European Commission, 2011). This purpose clearly represents the idea that adult education should be open to everyone, emphasising that it is a public good. The European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015) notes that all studies on adult education participation show that it is influenced by a number of variables and that "the adults most in need of education and training are those with the least access to lifelong learning opportunities: adults with low level or no credentials, adults in low-skilled occupations, the unemployed and economically inactive, older people, and the least skilled.

A powerful instrument for combating adult illiteracy, decreasing poverty, and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), is adult education. It is a tool for human survival and

happiness (Ojuola, 2015). Adult education has a critical role to play in combatting climate change, not only in supporting changes in behaviour but also, and much more crucially, in giving people the means to challenge, change and galvanize political will (Paul, 2022).

Adult education offers basic education and training possibilities to adults and out-of-school adolescents, ages 15 and older, who either did not receive a formal education throughout their childhood or who left school before achieving a level of sustainability educationally (Wanyama, 2014; Jinna&Maikano, 2014). Multidisciplinary adult education is delivered by a variety of actors in formal, non-formal, and informal settings. Basic and continuing education, technical and vocational education, higher education, and professional development are all subsumed under adult education (Obasi, 2014).

Adult education is education intended for adults (who had never attended school before or those who were unable to continue their education due to one obstacle or the other) to learn and, through learning, change their attitudes and behaviors in the hopes of bringing about favourable changes to the individual and the country at large (Adeyemo, 2013, Faradova, 2020). It primarily targets adults (those who have reached the legal adult age and are thus responsible for their own actions) with the goal of advancing their technical and/or professional qualifications, growing their skills and competencies, and expanding their knowledge (UIS, 2011).

Adult education provides learning opportunities for people at all levels, as it helps them experience transformation and a change in life. It is through adult education that adult learners become conscious of their environment's socioeconomic, cultural, and political issues (Onyenemezu, 2012). Adult education remains an essential component of the development process for positive changes, since poverty has become a defining characteristic of the Nigerian society (Seya, 2005). For all levels of school leavers, adult education creates a sort of rewarding ongoing effect that helps them succeed in a variety of professions. By enhancing people's abilities, knowledge, and awareness; adult education strives to improve well-being of such individuals. Adult education increases one's feeling of dignity and self-worth, their respect for others, their capacity to take charge of their lives, and their desire to engage in society (Hussain, 2013).

Similarly, adult education is a well-planned learning endeavour for adults (Aderinoye, 2007, as cited in Gbenro, 2021). Adult education can be termed an education that liberates people and nations from conditions of extreme poverty, while supporting them and nations in overcoming their problems. Any type of learning that older men and women engage in or that is offered to them outside of the formal educational system is commonly referred to as adult education (Seya, 2005). Nazor (2005) restates that the objectives of adult education are to provide incentives for adult participation, ensure coherence of programmes, personal development and family management, civic and peace education, community development education, entrepreneurship education, and literacy.

Formal, non-formal, and informal education can all be broadly categorized as adult education. Formal education refers to a set of planned educational activities for adults who are enrolled on a full or part-time basis. Typically, the programmes are provided within an institution and are conducted in compliance with their specified rules. Adult Basic Education (ABE), often known as formal adult education, covers adult basic literacy education (reading, writing, and numeracy), as well as post-literacy education, which enables students to make up for academic shortcomings or the incapacity to have attended school at all (Eheazu, 2019).

Non-formal adult education, in contrast, is out-of-school learning that includes training and instruction outside the bounds of formal educational systems and encompasses everything from specialized apprenticeships to mass mobilization and literacy across the country. In this way, non-formal adult education can be large-scale rural mobilization programmes to develop rural communities on specific goals, such as acquisition of desirable skills and attitudes, vocational education (providing entrepreneurial training for various classes of beneficiaries), and for social and political education (leadership training)(Eheazu, 2019). Adults who participate in informal adult education pick up new skills accidentally, unknowingly, or spontaneously while going about their

regular lives. This includes listening to the radio and coming across educational opportunities at work or elsewhere. Informal adult education is not like its formal or non-formal counterpart, in that there is no planning, set objectives, and training.

There are concerns about the provision of adult education in most countries, arising from the insufficient poor quality, limited and outdated statistics regarding it (Hinzen, 2007; Wanyama, 2014). There are weaknesses in the development and implementation of adult education programmes in Africa, especially in Nigeria (Wanyama, 2014); it is against this backdrop that this paper discussed the essence of adult education as a common good, challenges, and strategies for strengthening adult education in Nigeria.

### **Concept of Common Good.**

"The common good", "common goods", "the commons" are concepts widely discussed in philosophy, economics and political science. Recently they have attracted the attention of scholars in sociology and educational science as well.

The tradition of philosophical study of the common good dates back to Plato and Aristotle. The concept was further developed in the works of numerous philosophers and political theorists, including Thomas Aquinas, Niccolò Machiavelli, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, Jacques Maritain, John Rawls, etc. Despite the significant differences in how the common good is conceptualised in the various philosophical and political doctrines, it is generally viewed as a norm which unifies a given (political) community and is closely related to "public goods" and "the public interest" (Pusser, 2006; Etzioni, 2015; Hazelkorn & Gibson, 2017). The discussion on common goods has received a new impetus around the notion of the commons which has gained importance as a result of several ecological challenges arising from the growth of industry, cities and population. The commons' paradigm has brought to the fore the question of how best to govern natural resources used by many individuals in common, and the idea that community governance of resources is an effective vector for development that could counterbalance – or even replace – state intervention and privatisation (Locher, 2016).

The common good (also known as commonwealth, general welfare, or public benefit) is a concept in philosophy, economics, and political science that refers to either what is shared and beneficial for all or most members of a given community, or what is attained through citizenship, collective action, and active engagement in politics and public service. The concept of the common good varies widely across philosophical doctrines (Lee, 2016). Ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato established early concepts of the common good. One interpretation of the common good rooted in Aristotle's philosophy is still widely used today, referring to what one contemporary scholar called the "good proper to, and achievable only by, the community, yet individually shared by its members (Dupré, 2009).

### **Adult Education as a Common Good**

A common good viewpoint is especially appropriate for studying adult education since it conforms to the unique characteristics of this type of education. The most essential types of lifelong learning are adult education and adult learning. They contain many types of knowledge and skills (institutionalised and informal, organised and sporadic, purposeful and unintended) in various contexts (individual and social; employment and citizenship; leisure and work), in both public and private settings. Furthermore, they involve a diverse variety of actors (public and private institutions, NGOs, civic and religious organisations) functioning at different levels.

Adult education as a common good implies that it is necessary for human well-being in modern society. If we accept Amartya Sen's definition of human well-being as the freedoms that people have reason to choose and value (Sen, 1999) or Martha Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011), it is clear that human well-being in modern dynamic and liquid societies would be impossible without the development of adult education as a common good (Bauman, 2000). Adult education as a common good implies and necessitates its development as an inclusive process

shared by and useful to all or the majority of members of a given society. Adult education as a common good implies that it unfolds through mutual social relationships in and through which human people improve their well-being; it is thus a type of collective activity in which various and distinct social organisations are involved. The concept of the common good" is a rejection that society is and should be comprised of segregated individuals living in isolation from one another Simon (2016).

Adult education is a common good in and for a specific society if it "exists in the interactions that bring this community or society into life" (Hollenbach, 2002). This concept of adult education emphasises its complexity and the diversity of its responsibilities and ideals that extend beyond its utilitarian purpose, while also acknowledging its liberating and transforming goal (Boyadjieva&Ilieva-Trichkova, 2018). The idea of adult education as a common good is intimately tied to ideas like justice, rights (Walker & Boni, 2013), solidarity, and equality (Marginson, 2016).

Access to adult education is the most politicised aspect of the adult education system, because in many countries, the state sets standards for accreditation of schools providing adult education, limits the number of available places, provides financial incentives for people available to education, to name a few.

Adult education is a common good when it is accessible to a growing number of people and when policies have been implemented to reduce inequalities in, and barriers to, its access. The realisation of adult education as a common good depends on the country's specific institutional arrangements.

### **Essence of Adult Education in Nigeria**

There are many different ways that people and groups view adult education and how valuable it is. Some individuals only consider adult education from the viewpoint of an elderly adult learning to merely read and write, and not viewed as having a wide range of applications for young and middle-aged adults. Ojuola (2015) hinted that adult education enables individuals acquire the knowledge and skills needed for meaningful community life, actively participate in the development of their communities, improves their social well-being and happiness, reduces poverty, improves parenting styles and commitments, and health of individuals. It is based on these that several tertiary institutions around the world have made provision for adult education as a Department or a faculty (Okenimkpe, 2004). Thus, the under-listed are some of the essence of adult education, especially in Nigeria:

- Promoting religious tolerance and national integration: Adult education has become the instrument for fostering religious tolerance among the three major religious groups in the country. This has improved the country's national developmental agenda (Gbenro, 2021).
- Adult education enhances literacy and employability skills: It is through adult education that many adults who had no initial opportunity to be educated, becomes educated and employable. Thus, adult education reduces unemployment and improves a nations' gross domestic products (GDP). Adult education allows adults to develop valuable skills to improve career prospects and expand their professional knowledge.
- Improves adults' self-esteem: Adult education generally boosts the superiority complexes of adults, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging and self-esteem. These adults, who were formerly "illiterates", but has now been reformed by adult education, begin to see themselves as different and important.
- Strengthening of democracy: Adult education plays a significant role in strengthening democracy in Africa, and the world at large (Seya, 2005). Adult education is required to inform citizens about their rights and obligations as well as the democratic culture, since democracy calls for active participation from citizens at the local, national, and international levels (Jinna&Maikano, 2014).
- Inculcates the right values and attitudes on individuals for national unity and development (FRN, 2014).

- Increases national productivity: Adult education enhances labour efficiency and sense of creativity among adult learners, thus improving their living standards and national productivity (Adedokun, 2020).
- Adult education allows for social association and interactions among adult learners.
- Adult education serves as an instrument for actualising economic, political, cultural, and technological needs of adult learners (Faradova, 2020).
- Health benefits: Adult learning can have both transforming and sustaining effect on health (Jinna&Maikano, 2014).

### **Challenges of Adult Education in Nigeria**

Adult education in the Nigerian context has been bedeviled by several challenges which stems from:

- Poor funding: Adult education in Nigeria has been hampered by poor funding necessitated by poor budgetary allocation to the sector (ERC, 2013). This has affected access to and inclusiveness for many Nigerian adults into the educational fabrics of the nation. The inadequate funding has also affected the establishment of adult education centers, Departments and institutions in the country. More so, due to poor funding for adult education, finding qualified adult educators to hire is difficult, and there is the problem of accountability and transparency in the management of the meager funds allocated (Victor, 2002; Hussain, 2013).
- Negative perception of Nigerians about adult education: Adult education continues to be degraded by the wrong and negative perceptions of individuals against it. Many Nigerians (especially the youths) perceive adult education as unimportant to their life's dreams and aspirations, and that it is designed only for the old who may have little or no ambitions in life. This notion needs to be addressed among youths, and other education stakeholders, especially regarding the poor knowledge of the impacts of adult learning and education in general (Motschilnig, 2014). Another reason for this negative perceptions is the failure of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) to give adult education the accorded recognition in Nigeria (Hussain, 2013).
- Poor management and administration of adult education institutions and centres: There is mismanagement and maladministration of adult education centres in many parts of the country. Those who are assigned to champion the management of the various adult learning centres treats such centres with disinterest, and reckless abandon.
- Recruitment of unqualified tutors/facilitators: A challenge of adult education is the employment of unqualified persons who have no academic or professional background in adult education, to man and teach adult learners. In some centres, primary school teachers and even school certificate holders are usually appointed as facilitators (Hussain, 2013). Only professionals, who have been trained in the arts and act of adult teaching and learning should be recruited to teach in adult learning centres in Nigeria. More so, many of these tutors are not ICT compliant. This is a great challenge, especially with the advent of technological advancement.
- Poor condition of service: This is another problem facing adult education in Nigeria. Adult educators are poorly remunerated, and this affects their attitudes, motivation, and performance in the job.
- Poor and dilapidated teaching and learning facilities: In various adult learning centres in Nigeria, desks and benches that are uncomfortable for adults and for teaching-learning processes are used (Adeyemo, 2013). In many adult education centres, many of the tutors are owed salary arrears for months (Hussain, 2013).
- Poor planning of adult education programmes: As hinted by Nnazor (2005), there is incoherence and lack of purpose and strategies in the planning of adult education

programmes in Nigeria. In many tertiary institutions in Nigeria, there is neglect and low priority accorded adult education in the curriculum (Obasi, 2014).

- Lack of advocacy, enlightenment, and mobilisation for adult education: Many adults who would have loved to be educated more are not aware of the adult education programmes, centres and institution in Nigeria. Philanthropists who would have also invested in adult education in the country, are not aware of its intricacies in Nigeria. This is caused by the inadequate advocacy, enlightenment, and mobilisation regarding adult education in the country.
- Poor monitoring and evaluation of adult education programmes in Nigeria: There is a shortage of trained monitoring and evaluation staff for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of adult education and its programmes in Nigeria.
- Poor implementation of adult education policies and frameworks: The success of adult education in Nigeria over the years have been hampered by a lack of standardised policies and frameworks for implementing adult teaching and learning (Moja, 2000; Wanyama, 2014).
- Poor regulation of adult education as a professional discipline: In Nigeria, and many countries in sub-sahara Africa, adult education is not regulated as expected of any professional discipline such as law, medicine, engineering, to mention a few. There is no specified entry requirements into the discipline, no specified adult education professional association to maintain the codes and conduct of the discipline (Jutte, et al., 2011).
- Balancing education and full-time career is difficult for many adult students, who also have responsibilities at home and at workplace. Moreover, after working for many years and staying out of the school setting, returning back to school poses a significant barrier.

### **Strategies for strengthening Adult Education in Nigeria**

- i. Enacting and promoting adult education policies and frameworks: Legislation should be used to support effective policies in order to ensure their full implementation and the success of the actual activities conducted. This can be achieved through efficient and participatory governance (Keriga& Abdullah, 2009).
- ii. Improvement in and continuous monitoring and evaluation of adult education: Adult education and its programmes should have quality control, and this can only be achieved where adequate monitoring and evaluation frameworks are guaranteed. Regular and effective supervision (monitoring), and evaluation of adult education as a discipline, adult educators and learners, adult learning centres, as well as facilities within them is paramount towards the sustenance and successful implementation of adult education in Nigeria (Aruma&Okorie, 2019; UNESCO, 2019).
- iii. Proper mobilisation of all stakeholders: There is need to properly mobilise concerned education stakeholders on the relevance, and scope of adult education, as well as its programmes in Nigeria. With these, adult education and its programmes would be well embraced, which will go a long way in achieving the desired results
- iv. Promoting vocational training: Adult education can be used for improving employability of the workforce in the country through continuous vocational training via adult education curriculum. It is by this that adult learners acquire the necessary skills and attitudes to function perfectly in the labour market or elsewhere.
- v. Training of professional adult educators at institutions of higher learning must be in tandem with the prevailing global trends. More so, in lieu of the current information and computer technology era, adult educators should be kept abreast with the innovative and computer-assisted teaching and learning approaches.
- vi. New and responsive curricula for adult education should be developed with the needs of the adult learners put into consideration. This can be achieved by encouraging active,

- participative, and cooperative education, while the relevance and impact of the use technology in aiding learning, should be enshrined into such curriculum (Adedokun, 2020).
- vii. Increased allocation of funds for adult education in Nigeria: As against the current poor funding allocated to education, governments at all levels should provide more funding for education in general, and adult education in particular.
  - viii. Adult learners should be provided a conducive environment. As such, the dilapidated infrastructural facilities in schools, colleges and other related institutions must be improved
  - ix. Adult educators need to be adequately remunerated, and given other motivational incentives for them to perform optimally.
  - x. Governments at all levels should sponsor adult education enlightenment programmes through the social media, Television and Radio broadcasts. Such programmes should be broadcast both in English language and in the local languages.
  - xi. Promoting and adopting e-learning: In the current education dispensation, e-learning has come to stay. As such, both adult students and educators, should embrace ICT skills, knowledge, and competencies (Adedokun et al., 2020).
  - xii. Establishing adult education Departments in universities, and other higher institutions.

## CONCLUSION

Adult education as a common good is paramount in facilitating inclusiveness in education, as it provides opportunity for all learners, irrespective of age, class, academic standing, ethnicity, religion and political orientations, to acquire the attitudes, skills, knowledge and experiences for active participation in community and national development, and for self-actualisation. In view of the essence of adult education, and the challenges confronting the discipline, this paper suggests strategies for strengthening adult education in Nigeria. The new global Education 2030 Agenda emphasises lifelong learning. Adult education has the potential to make a significant contribution to the Education 2030 Agenda provided it is understood, administered, and conducted from a humanistic viewpoint that considers both individual and public interests and calls for the pursuit of shared goals. Hence, governments and other education stakeholders in Nigeria should continue to fund and support initiatives and programmes targeted at enhancing adult education in the country.

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