

QUALITY ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINBLE LIVELIHOOD IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria as one of the developing countries of the globe is characterised with various degree of challenges particularly non-literacy among its citizenry. Literacy is the foundation for all further learning. It is equally seen as inevitable hurdle of Education for All (EFA) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 within the comprehensive 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It therefore, becomes imperative for all countries particularly developing countries to ensure inclusive, accessible and qualitative adult literacy education for all. This paper, therefore, begins with concept of adult literacy and its importance. It critically discusses the challenges hindering the provision of qualitative adult literacy in Nigeria. Some of these challenges include lack of political will and continuity, inappropriate funding, non-availability of trained facilitators, among others. It equally discussed sustainable development as an indispensable factor of livelihood. This paper concludes that there is need for stronger policies, political will and national commitment by the three tiers of government for adult literacy education provision if sound literate society is to be sustained.

Introduction

Education can be seen as one of the most vital provisions for citizens and is the best legacy any nation can give to her citizens especially the non-literate adults, youths, women and other vulnerable persons. The fact remains that education is an indispensable tool for development of any nation are it developed or developing. The quality education is of the two components of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 within the comprehensive 2030Agenda for Sustainable Development. Education has been defined by many educationists, philosophers and authors. It is a word we hear very familiar in everyday life because education is considered the most

significant activity in any society. Something that is important, but not independent of the number of opinions and assumptions about the meaning and definition of true education.

Education is a process of transmitting what is worthwhile from one generation to another. Education is the process of training man to fulfill his aim by exercising all the potentials to the fullest extent as a member of society. Education is defined as a learning process for the individual to attain knowledge and understanding of the higher specific object. (Source: Big Indonesian Dictionary, 1991) Notably, the usefulness of literacy as a pivoting tool of livelihood cannot be overemphasized. In other word, the benefits derived from literacy has gone beyond reading, writing and arithmetic popularly tagged as 3Rs but include improved livelihood, health, political participation and other current typology of literacies.

Nigeria is the most populous nation in Sub-Saharan Africa with the current population of 224,427,233 as of Sunday, August 13, 2023, based on Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data. Nigeria 2023 population is estimated at 223,804,632 people at midyear. Nigeria population is equivalent to 2.78% of the total world population. (Nigeria population, Worldometer-2023). The literacy rate reached 77.62% in 2021. Between 2010 and 2021, the literacy rate of Nigeria grew by 13.9%. On a year-on-year basis, the literacy rate increased by 0.13% in 2021. The percentage of the population in each age group who is literate serves as a measure of literacy. (Literacy Rate in Nigeria 2010 - 2021, % – Global Data)

Consequently, the need for a literate society for improved and sustained livelihood is germane. Nigeria has been involved in various activities tailored towards providing and making literacy accessible to would-be beneficiaries, such as Better Life for Rural Women, which was the outcome of a workshop held in Abuja in 1987 on the role of rural women in development, with emphasis on issues relating to nutrition, agriculture and, above all, education, particularly the literacy component. Oghenekohwo and Oputu (2017) posited that literacy is at the heart of sustainable development. It was stressed that literacy is the tool of social change and a key to empowerment, which serves as the three major pillars of sustainable development i.e. economic development, social development and environmental protection.

Adult Literacy

Adult literacy education means an educational programme designed to provide basic literacy skills. Literacy mean the ability to read and write may come to mind. However, people

have understood literacy as a binary concept that you are either literate or not. But it turns out that literacy looks different across the globe. In a nut shell, literacy is a way of thinking which allows individuals to speak, listen, read and write a set of beliefs or ideas.

The meaning of literacy could be more difficult to understand when we consider how it's meaning changes from one culture to another. In other words, *being literate in one culture does not necessarily mean you are literate in another*. This is sequel to the fact that different cultures speak different languages, use different writing systems, and hold different values and practices. It becomes clear that literacy is not the same all around the world but rather a skill set that varies from culture to culture and from society to society. It is important to note that literacy could be defined differently by everyone to suit when and where definition has been given. However, the general and current trend all over the globe today is that literacy has gone beyond the ability to read, write and compute simple arithmetic.

However, definitions of literacy depend on emerging technology tools which require different ways of conceiving and communicating meaning presented in multiple media and modality forms as a part of literacy. Literacy generally refers to reading and writing effectively in a variety of contexts. In the 21st century, the definition of literacy has increasingly reflected the ability to use technology for gathering and communicating information. The International Reading Association (IRA) stated that the literacies used currently were much different from the previous trends (IRA, 2009). The IRA position statement reported that in order “to become fully literate in today’s world, beneficiaries must become proficient in the literacies of the 21st century technologies”. Since IRA’s statement adoption in 2009, abundant research has been published about 21st century literacy skills. In addition, the National Education Technology Plan (NETP, 2010) called for an emphasis on 21st century competencies at all levels of education. However, literacy concepts have not only been changing, they have been overlapping, as information literacy, multiliteracies/multiple literacies, new literacy, digital literacy, and web literacy are all used to describe similar skills necessary for 21st century learning.

Governments and other stakeholders are increasingly interested in assessing the skills of their adult populations in order to monitor how well prepared they are for the challenges of the modern knowledge based society. Adults are expected to use information in complex ways and to maintain and enhance their literacy skills to adapt to ever changing technologies. Literacy is important not only for personal development, but also for positive educational, social and

economic outcomes.

On an international level, there are three adult literacy surveys, the Adult Literacy and Life skills Survey (ALL), the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), and the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) which is currently in progress. Data from ALL and IALS reveal that low skills are found in countries and that these low skills pose problems for individuals trying to cope with work and life in modern societies where the demands for literacy skills are on the increase.

The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) is designed to assess the current state of the skills of individuals and nations in the new information age. It builds upon earlier conceptions of literacy from IALS in the 1990s and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey ALL in 2003 and 2006 to facilitate an appropriate assessment of the broad range of literacy skills required for the 21st century. The framework broadens the definition of literacy to make it relevant to the information age, in particular, by including the skills of reading in digital environments.

In PIAAC, "Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society".

Importance of adult literacy

Adult literacy education tries to develop the learners in having behaviour that will guarantee survival of societies and individuals in order to encourage behavioural change that clearly suit what is fundamental in real life. It present an opportunity to the adults who missed a chance to understand basic concepts in their times to transmit culture and societal structure to support social change. This would influence the study of practical knowledge and gain problem-solving skills that will enable to transmit this to the growing generation so as to reform the society.

The mission of adult literacy education is to develop the people who are open to alteration and continued learning in order to improve their personal growth and development. This concept clearly eases self-actualisation of the adult learners who are in need of embracing the rapid changes that they never experienced.

Adult literacy education programme also develops certified adult educators who are philosophical practitioners who will be able to create essential, economic, social and political changes in society. In general, the overall aim of the adult literacy education entails putting forward a “foundation basis where more adults can be able to advance their knowledge and skills to gain insight of the current changes which they had not experienced in the past” (Jones & Patrick 2007).

Adult literacy education has an impact on the individual and the society in mult-faceted dimensions of development such as the economic, social, political, and cultural, among others (Akinpelu, 2002)

Adult literacy education also helps adult learners in establishing personal and business goals. When directions become to them an instiller of their role identities, they are able to make rational changes. Through adult literacy education, self-confidence will be nature by the adult learners therefore; they will be able to make rational decision based on the learned experiences. Adult literacy education being a participatory approach of education enables the beneficiaries to enhance a cooperative effort on their achievements of the goals and the objectives. Lacking basic reading and writing skills is a tremendous disadvantage. Literacy not only enriches an individual’s life, but it creates opportunities for people to develop skills that will help them provide for themselves and their family. Literacy has been regarded as one of the strongest predictors of individual success, and it enhance people’s ability to finish schooling and secure jobs all around the world. Literacy also has the power to impact individual well-being and increases life satisfaction.

The positive knock-on effect of educating girls can be seen in the wider social and economic benefits yielded for their communities. Increasing the emphasis towards women’s education positively impacts on each generation through raised expectations and increased self-esteem. Improving literacy facilitates employment whereby both males and females can contribute, helping the wider economy and community to thrive.

Non-literacy directly affects an individual’s health and wellbeing, so the importance of education on physical health is vital. Those without education are more likely to be vulnerable to health problems, for example increased schooling reduces the risk of HIV infection. Infant mortality rates drop significantly for women who have had primary education, and even more for those who complete secondary school. It is estimated that infant mortality decreases 9% for

every year of education attained. This is because girls and women are able to educate themselves on health issues, which can help reduce the cycle of poverty and mortality rates in the long term.

The global non-literate population of young girls is 61.9 per cent so the importance of education for women cannot be understated. Breaking the cycle of non-literacy and improving self-esteem is crucial for women and girls in the developing world. By enabling them to become economically productive and independent, they become empowered and can take control of their lives. The importance of education in fostering personal autonomy, and creative and critical thinking skills is central to helping girls contribute to their societies. Literacy positively impacts economic growth beyond the local community

The impact of improving literacy not only has a positive economic impact at a local and community level, but the productivity of the workforce flourishes at country level too by enhancing a country's economic strength. A person no longer stymied by understanding a job application will have the skills to not just find employment, but also retain employment. They'll be able to put food on their own table, provide for their families, and in turn strengthen our economy.

Improved literacy also results in more informed health decisions regarding nutrition and preventative care, which obviously benefit the individual but also create better health outcomes and lower healthcare costs for the nation as a whole. Importantly too, a mother's reading skill is the most important factor when it comes to her children's academic success, helping an adult particularly a woman to become more literate now has the power to increase her children's success in the future, effectively breaking the cycle of low literacy and correlated poverty that plague our communities.

In tackling the matters concerning the society, those people who have the capacity to advice are usually the adults. When they partake in adult literacy education, they are able to come up with collaborative ideas that will be capable of transforming the negative aspects inculcated in the society to well-nourished behaviour. The responsibilities of taking care of the children lies to the parent and without proper knowledge and skills that have been effectively put into practice, the children will obviously engage themselves in affairs that might end up destroying their lives hence provoking the societal dignity. The significant purpose of adult literacy education in the society is to offer a means of self- discovery for the adults who have a willpower and inventiveness in overcoming obstacles.

Adult literacy education portrays a supply to the widening of general resource and life satisfaction to all people therefore bridging the gap that exists between the least and the most educated sectors of the population. A change exists if the people in the society who are disadvantaged in terms of education acquire the chance to access this adult literacy education. Adult literacy education fosters a sense of responsibility in that it tries to give emphasis on the right behaviours that ought to be practiced within the society. This factor assists dramatically the society in molding of the norms that are fundamental in achieving development. Through adult literacy education, the society is able to develop more programmes that facilitate development. This is so in that when an individual member of the society undergoes transformation such that through the education process he or she gets a good job opportunity; more revenue will be generated therefore facilitating the development.

Sustainable Development and livelihood

Sustainability: Sustainability is the ability to sustain, maintain, provide for or nourish something for an indefinite period without damaging or depleting it. In recent years, an understanding of the concept of sustainability has been firmly established by many scholars and researchers. Sustainability consists of three dimensions: the protection of natural environment, the maintenance of economic vitality and observance of specific social considerations about human development. The notion of sustainability can be understood in various meanings and is defined in many contexts as a technical term used in forestry; as an ecological term; as well as a new definition which refers to the development of humanity and of human societies (Di Giulio, 2006).

The truism that education is the surest way to sustainably develop any people or society needs no contention. Education, as have already pointed out, is the process of imparting and acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and experiences in institutions of learning, while living, at work or play. The skills so acquired are subsequently applied to sustain present and future generation in their everyday life. It is the proper nurturing, transmission and application of such skills and knowledge that guarantees development and sustenance of the society (Abiodun, 2002).

Therefore, the objectives of sustainable development will require the protection of the natural resources upon which future development depends. For many advocates of sustainable development, valuing nature and human life in an intrinsic way has also become an integral part of development (Bakar, 2005). According to Ilechukwu (2014), development is sustainable if “it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Promoting and improvement of adult literacy education recognised that sustainable development requires changes in attitudes and values towards sustainability and development and that adult literacy education has central role to play in achieving those changes. In order to achieve this, progress must be made toward provision of qualitative and accessible adult literacy education in the areas of infrastructure, human resources, and instructional materials. The importance of adult literacy education is to transform and improve the conditions of both the learner and the community towards sustainable development (Association of African Universities, 2009).

Sequel to above discourse, the influence of adult literacy education in sustainable development cannot be overemphasised. Adult literacy education empowers people for their roles in society. Therefore, adult literacy education could be regarded as one of the factor influencing sustainable livelihood. It is important to note that adults need to acquire literacy for sustainable development as it improves their livelihood cum the community where they live. Achieving this will provide them with the opportunity to begin to value the world’s cultural diversity and appreciate the issues facing our world and of the impact they have on those issues.

Challenges of adult literacy

It is imperative to note that for any successful programme or organisation, it is always without challenges or pitfalls. This implies that no success comes so easy. Thus, the education industry in general is faced with challenges while adult literacy is not an exceptional. Therefore, the major challenges facing adult literacy education delivery in Nigeria according to policy issues and practice (2010) are enormous. It became worrisome that there still exist the conceptual challenges of various forms and scope of adult education as most adult education practitioners differs in defining adult education and that adult literacy is not adult education but just an aspect of it.

Another serious challenge facing adult literacy education has been the lack of political will and continuity on the part government. This happen when there is a change in government particularly where the political party in power changed. The possibilities to continue with existing programmes are not often visible.

The need for accessibility to adult literacy education becomes investable as the world is no longer static but dynamic. Hence, adult literacy centres should be made available close to would-be beneficiaries so as to enhance participation. However, all citizens should have the opportunity to develop themselves at whatever age since learning is continuous process so as to acquire knowledge and know-how to better their life. This will enhance or improve their quality of livelihood, develop their potential and experience the joy of learning. Hence, no area should be left untouched in order to facilitate the acquisition of this quality of livelihood. Consequently, the accessibility of the literacy programme should equally be made fees free to encourage participation of the beneficiaries.

Adult literacy education is faced with inadequate funding. The budgetary allocation to adult education at all levels of government is grossly inadequate especially when compared to the formal education sector. However, the salient question is that what happen to the merger allocation? The issues of accountability and transparency in the management of funds allocated to the sector have been an uphill task and worrisome as there is inadequate provision of adult literacy programmes especially at grass root.

The issue of inadequate mobilisation has been another obstacle hindering the wider participation of many would-be learners. Thus, many are not aware of the provision or availability of the adult literacy education centres and such couldn't enroll for the programmes. This has greatly affects the realisation of Education for All (EFA). Stakeholders should equally be mobilized to ensure mass participation of the would-be beneficiaries. Notably too is that ignorance is not merely inability to know or aware but ignorance that lead to not knowing that one's livelihood can be bettered particularly through adult literacy education. Hence, the need for appropriate mobiliasation enhances massive participation of the non-literate adults.

There is grossly inadequate number of adult literacy qualified facilitators while the available ones lack Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills. This in no small measure has affected effective use of Information and Communication Technology for adult literacy education delivery where available. Sequel to inadequate number of qualified facilitators

called for appointment of non-professionals and untrained facilitators who cannot differentiate between andragogical and pedagogical techniques of instruction. This scenario most often warrants the appointment of primary school teachers and even school certificate holders as facilitators. According to NMEC (2017) Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) should be the minimum teaching qualification in compliance with the provision of National Policy on Education to ensure the quality delivery in Adult Literacy Education.

There is shortage of skilled personnel in the area of monitoring and evaluation. Lack of trained monitoring and evaluation personnel in the adult literacy education units is a serious challenge to the provision of adult literacy programmes since monitoring or supervision is as important as the programme itself. It involves the management of a large database. Monitoring is vital pivot for successful provision and implementation of adult literacy programme policies.

It wasn't news to note that poor remuneration of facilitators by most states and Local Government Areas across country is diver stating as it is affecting effective productivity on the part of the facilitators. Ironically, the 7500 naira stipulated in the benchmark meant for the remuneration of the facilitators cannot be paid by almost all the states. In some cases, facilitators were owed for several months.

There is a problem of poor record keeping in adult literacy education programmes. This has seriously affected the database needed for adequate planning and implementation of adult literacy education programmes. This is equally affecting the assessment of the beneficiaries' performance so as to determine their progression or advancement particularly from basic to post literacy programmes.

Conclusion

Adult literacy education is tailored towards improving the livelihood of people by increasing their skills acquisition, potential and to avert their ignorance. Adult literacy education is an indispensable tool that could transform individuals and nations as it developed or developing. The development of any nation depends on the quality of adults that the nation has. Adult literacy education influences great sense of dignity and self-esteem, enhanced respect of others, an ability to take control of one's life and a greater desire to participate in societal development efforts. Adult literacy education should be vigorously pursued to enhance an all-round development particularly the improvement of individual's livelihood. Therefore, adult

literacy education should be re-positioned to meet the ever increasing demand of its time and to enable the nation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Education for All (EFA) of 2030 Agenda.

Recommendations

Adult literacy education should be funded at three tiers of government especially at the local government council across the country (Nigeria) as literacy provision at this level is at comma that needs urgent attention.

Establishment more centres of adult literacy education in the country should be embarked upon so as to make adult literacy accessible to would-be participants. Importantly, adult literacy provision should be tailored toward functional literacy to enhance self-reliance.

Facilitators' remuneration should be given priority and be paid as stipulated in the minimum benchmark set by the Non-Formal Education blue print that facilitators should be paid minimum wage as their remuneration/allowances.

Provision of adult literacy education should be an inclusive effort as government alone cannot do an all the needful.

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