



Adult and non-formal education: Meaning, importance, and scope

Joseph Chukwutobe Chieke, Johnson Nnadi Ewelum*, Luke Chidiebele Ogbaka

Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to bring out the real value and worth of adult and non-formal education in a country such as Nigeria, and to dispel the notion or perception that adult and non-formal education is inferior to formal. The paper critically examined what adult education is, and what it is not. This paper therefore, seeks to clear misunderstandings and misconceptions about adult education and to instil the right attitude towards adult and non-formal education. It also looks at the meaning of non-formal education and different aspects of non-formal education. Equally, different programmes under non-formal education and characteristics or features of non-formal education were highlighted. The scope of adult and non-formal education was extensively discussed.

Keywords: Adult, non-formal education, meaning, importance, scope

Introduction

At times people use literacy education, community development and nomadic education as if they are one and the same thing as adult education. Literacy education community development and nomadic education are not the same thing as adult education. They are only aspects of adult education. Adult education is more than that. Adult education is a discipline without borders. It is an academic discipline that cuts across all other disciplines, the adult way, for example, a professor of Economics who is learning how to be computer literate is engaged in adult learning. In the same way, a professor of crop science who is educating mature farmers on how to select choice seeds in order to have bumper harvest is engaged in adult education, though, he or she may not know that or believe that. That is the nature of adult education. It is versatile. A medical doctor giving health talks to a group of pregnant women on how to have safe delivery is engaged in adult education. Every activity of adults that has educational implication is adult education. (Chieke, 2021)^[6]

Similarly, some authors use non-formal education and adult education interchangeably as if they are the same thing but this is not so. While adult education involves only adults and could be formal or non-formal in nature, non-formal education involves both the adult and the young ones but non-formal education is usually non-formal in nature and never formal. Though much of adult education programmes are non-formal, some of the programmes are formal. For instance, many of the further education programmes of the adults are in the tertiary institutions as formal education-Continuing Education Programmes (CEP) in various Nigeria Universities (Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka). In the same vein, all unorganized educational experiences of the adult which may be categorized as informal are not non-formal education despite the fact that they may be outside the formal school system, for instance, education of adult in the home (Agbionu, Obidiegwu, Obiozor & Adebola, 2014)

^[2]

Meaning of Adult Education

The concept of adult education is difficult to define because scholars define it from different perspectives. However, scholars agreed that it is an education that has adults as its clientele. UNESCO (1976)^[24] cited in Nzeneri (2010)^[12] defined adult education as: 'The entire body of organized educational process, whatever the content, level and method, formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools or 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 and bring about changes in their attitude or behavior in the two fold perspectives of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development. This definition of adult education, by UNESCO seems all embracing and all encompassing, in that it did not only define adult education, but went further to report on its scope and content. Adult education includes programmes for both literate and illiterates' persons which brings about changes in personal and societal development''.

According to Seya (2005)^[21], adult education usually refers to any form of learning undertaken by or provided for mature men and women outside the formal school system. He noted that the main targets of adult education are youths (girls and boys over 15 years of age but sometimes younger) as well as women and men who are generally poor or socially disadvantaged. This is an archaic form of definition of adult education. The researcher's view is in contrary to that of Seya (2005)^[21], because adult education is not only for the poor and socially disadvantaged, as mentioned earlier, but also for the rich and powerful for instance, a lawyer who is delivering a paper to his clients on legal matters is engaged in adult education, Equally, a medical doctor who embarks on a speech on safe delivery to a group of pregnant women is engaged in adult education. Residency programmes for medical doctors is an adult education programme yet, it is not of or for the poor. However, according to Obidiegwu (2017), some

professionals and experts are involved in adult education without knowing it. Obidiegwu (2017) ^[15], noted that many colleagues play the role of adult educators than they know it. An adult educator defined briefly, is a person who takes responsibility for helping adults learn. Many colleagues serve as Head of Departments (HODs), Deans and sub-deans, Directors, where they play the same role of helping adults learn.

Gboku and Lekoku (2007) ^[7] defined adult education as a process whereby persons who no longer attend school on a regular and fulltime basis, undertake sequential and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, undertakings or skills, appreciation and attitudes or for the purpose of identifying and solving personal or community problem. This sequential and organized activities include programmes as sandwich, Remedial and Continuing Education programmes, Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK) prescience and Nnamdi Azikiwe University (Unizik) Business schools. This is in line with

Akinpelu (2002) ^[3] who maintained that continuing education is not an initial aspect of education but presupposes that an individual has acquired an aspect of education but wishes to continue at present. The definition of Gboku and Lekoku is deficient because it never considered those who have not been to school and those who are professionals. Adult education, in its ramifications, includes formal, non-formal and informal aspects of education. Adult education is formal when the educational process is conducted within the four walls of a school, consciously planned, organized and also graded into various levels. It is non-formal education, when educational process is organized outside of a formal school system such as in seminars, conferences and workshops. It is informal when it is not organized. Informal knowledge is obtained through daily experiences such as through the media and other forms of informal interactions.

The difficulty in the definition of adult education arises mainly due to the word, “adult”, in adult education. The definition of the word, “adult”, differs from culture to culture, from country to country, from a scholar to another scholar. Hence, there are many parameters to define adulthood. Nzeneri (2010) ^[12], defines an adult as a person who is physically and psychologically mature and who is socially, economically and politically responsible. Ani (2010) ^[4] Observed that an adult is one who attains an appropriate age and physical development and performs recognizable social functions at which the person feels and the society regards that person as an adult. To Mintz (2015) ^[10], an adult is a person who is married, has children, supporting his family, and if female caring for her family. Definitions of adulthood are often inconsistent and contradictory. Legal adulthood age, differs from country to country. For example, in Japan and Thailand, a person is legally considered an adult when he or she attains the age of 20years (Plaza homes, 2018 & Isaan Lawyers, 2018) ^[8, 20] while in Nigeria and USA, the legal age of adulthood is 18 years.

Chronologically, defining a person as an adult differs from culture to culture and from person to person, because there is no particular age considered as a general age of adulthood in all cultures. A person can be considered chronologically matured but economically not matured because the person can neither sustain himself nor his family or parents. These

inconsistencies in defining the word adult, contributed to difficulty in defining the field of adult educations. According to Obidiegwu (2023) ^[14], the word “adult” is a difficult concept to define. It does not lend itself to single universal definition, hence it is subjective, ambiguous and culture –specific. She added that the word “adult” in adult education means maturity (growing up) and not chronological age (growing old). The author defines maturity as the continuous acquisition of experiences for mental development, freedom and wisdom throughout life. This maturity is as a result of learning and experiences one has garnered in-and –out- of- school.

Obiozor and Obidiegwu (2013) ^[16] submitted that there are certain parameters which could be used to measure whom an adult is. These parameters include:- Physiological/physical, Historical, Political/Legal, Socio-economic, Psychological and Chronological parameters. Physiological/ physical parameter refers to using the physical size to adjudge a person as an adult. Historical Parameter sees a person as an adult if he or she is able to narrate stories of past events, for example Nigeria civil war. Political/legal parameter uses constitutional age of a person and political post held to determine adulthood. For example, in Nigeria, by constitution, a person is an adult if he/she is 18 years and above, and if the person successful held a political post, such a person is considered an adult. Socio-economic parameter sees a person as an adult if the person is able to perform certain social roles effectively and be able to earn his or her living, for example, as a parent, worker. Psychological parameter refers an individual as an adult if the person is responsible for his life and actions, and also confidence and courage in his ability. (Obiozor & Obidiegwu, 2013) ^[16].

Nzeneri (2010) ^[12] added that psychological maturity involves ability to contribute sound, articulated and ordered intellectual and balanced ideas. None of the above parameters is completely right because they did not address in entirety the meaning of adulthood, and none is completely wrong because each of them has an aspect of the meaning of adult hood. For one to have a single and comprehensive definition of adulthood, one has to collapse all the parameters into a wholesome definition.

Meaning of Non-Formal Education

Similarly, the concept of non-formal education could be seen as an offshoot of adult education which has been defined in different ways: Non-formal education can be defined as an educational activity which is organized outside the formal school system, it is flexible, learner-centered and uses participating and hands-on approach. World Health Organization (WHO) (2010) ^[26], refers to non-formal education as education that occurs outside the formal school system. Non-formal education is often used interchangeably by different authors with terms such as adult education, lifelong education, and second chance educations. Non-formal education is an aspect of adult education, not, adult education proper. This view was supported by Agbionu, Obidiegwu, Obiozor and Adebola (2014) ^[2] who opined that people use non-formal education and adult education interchangeably as if they are the same concept but this is not true. However, Aderinoye (2004) ^[1] perceived non-formal education as any organized systematic educational activity undertaken outside the framework of the formal school system for the purpose of providing

specialized type of learning to a particular sub group in the population.

In the same vein, Agbionu *et al* (2014) ^[2] sees non-formal education from apprenticeship, perspective. He defined non-formal education as a form of education acquired through apprenticeship methods, outside the formal school system leading to acquisition of skills. Obidiegwu (2010) ^[13], noted that non-formal education equips its recipients with practical and entrepreneurship skills which is aimed at self-reliance, self-employment, innovation and creativity. According to the author it is the solution to the present high rate of unemployment in this country. These definitions have certain things in common, suggesting the distinctive feature of non-formal education. Such common feature includes being out of the formal school system, being organized, serving specific clientele and serving specific objectives.

Programmes of Non-Formal Education

Non-formal education has different types of programmes which include but not limited to the following; (Obiozor & Obidiegwu 2013) ^[16]

1. Literacy programmes such as functional, basic and post basic literacy.
2. Extension programmes such as farmers training programmes.
3. Continuing education programmes (done out of school).
4. Remedial education for those who dropped out of the formal school education.
5. Prison education for prison inmates.
6. Apprenticeship programmes for youths and adults.
7. Conferences, seminars, and workshops.
8. Community education or community programmes of instruction in areas such as health, nutrition, family planning (Okenimpe, 2003 ^[17]; Oladapo, 2004) ^[18].
9. Masters' and Doctor of philosophy (Ph.D) programmes (Gboku & Lekoku, 2007) ^[7].

Non-formal education programs are designed to meet the specific needs of individuals in the society: They may be adults, youths or younger persons in different fields of knowledge. Non-formal education programs accommodate all categories of learners such as rural poor men and women, low income earners, educationally disadvantaged, physically challenged farmers. It gives youths and adults who missed out in the formal school system an opportunity to acquire new knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to help them become useful and productive citizen in the society. It is relatively cheaper compared to formal school system.

Characteristics of Non-Formal Education

The characteristics of non-formal education have been identified by Obiozor and Obidiegwu 2013 ^[16]; Olateju (2002) as;

1. **Flexibility:** This is a major characteristic of non-formal education. It is not rigid in terms of age, place, time, or learning and teaching procedure.
2. **Need Orientedness:** Non-formal education is tailored towards meeting the needs of learners.
3. **Learner centeredness:** Non-formal education focuses on the interest, ability, and convenience of the learner. It is not necessary for all the learners to do the same thing at the same times, each learns according to his interest or convenience.

4. **Part-time in Nature:** Most of the non-formal education programs are on part time basis.
5. **Non-compulsory certification:** Non-formal education may or may not involve certification at the end of the programme. Some non-formal education programmes such as conferences, seminars, and workshops may involve certification but some other programmes may not.
6. Equip individuals with competencies to transform their knowledge and skills into concrete terms.

Non formal education fills the gaps in learning created by the formal school system because it does not discriminate among social groups. The drawbacks of formal education necessitated the consideration for resorting to non-formal education as an important supplement and alternative to formal education. This agrees with Aderinoye (2004) ^[1] who sees non-formal education as serving as supplement as well as complement to formal education.

It is reported that one in every five of the worlds out of school children is in Nigeria. Even though, primary education is officially free and compulsory, about 19.5million of the country's children aged 5 – 14 years are not in school (UNICEF, 2013) ^[25]. Azeezat (2018) ^[5], lamented that the population of out-of school children in Nigeria has risen from 10.5 million to 13. 2 million. What is the hope of these children if all efforts to enroll them in the formal school system failed? The answer is adult and non-formal education. This clearly demonstrates the importance of adult and non-formal Education in Nigeria. The authors view point is that adult and non-formal education in Nigeria should be should be adequately funded and supported to be able to tackle its numerous challenges in the county. One of the pressing challenges facing adult and non-formal education now in Nigeria is the growing rate of adult illiteracy which stands at 62% (Knoema, 2018) ^[9]. There is a necessity for the Federal government of Nigeria to set up ministry for adult and non-formal education. In other words, a ministry of adult and non-formal education should be created in Nigeria, headed by a minister at the Federal level and a Commissioner at the State level. The separation of adult and non-formal education from the ministry of Education is overdue in Nigeria for effectiveness to be achieved.

Scope of Adult and Non-Formal Education

Adult and non-formal education is diverse and has a very wide scope. The scope is quite encompassing and cannot be exhausted here because most of the emerging knowledge, skills, values and attitude gain large audience through adult and non-formal education. Adult and non-formal education includes community development and social work which encompass very broad areas of education activities. The scope of adult education therefore, is as broad as life. Adult education as an integral part of lifelong education can contribute massively to economic and cultural development, social progress and world peace as well as to the development of educational system. (UNESCO, 1976 ^[24] cited in Nzeneri (2010) ^[12]). The broad nature of adult and non-formal education programs is captured by Nzeneri (2010) ^[12] when he perceived adult education as that form of education programme that is properly planned and

methodologically applied, for the provision of remedial continuing and /or other aspects or forms of education to adults or adolescents outside the formal school system.

Ani (2010)^[4] and Ugwoegbu (2014)^[22] summarized the scope of adult and non-formal education, as follows:

Vocational or Occupational Education

Vocational education is that type of education and training that prepares a person for employment or that which is provided during employment to assist the learner or workers to undertake their occupational role more effectively. Vocational education is found in such programmes like training someone on how to type with the typewriter in order to become a typist or training someone on how to become a teacher. Adults are trained in other various field of occupation for employment. An adult who is employed in any type of vocation can be trained more in that vocation to be more effective and efficient in that occupation (NMEC, 2010). Vocational education also includes youths and adults who are never employed but wish to be trained in one trade or the other to acquire specific skills and knowledge that will help him or her earn an income or become self-employed after training. Vocational education, therefore, enables individuals to improve one's working efficiency and increase productivity.

Lifelong Education

Lifelong education is education that an individual acquires from the time one is born to the time of death of the person. The concept of lifelong education sees education as a process in a person that makes him to express himself, communicate and raise questions about his environment. This shows that man's urge for learning cannot be satisfied. That is, that man continues to learn as long as he is alive. This is the cradle to grave approach of education (Ugwuegbu, 2014). This means that the process of education in a man or woman never really comes to an end. Lifelong education means that learning does not only occur when one is in school but goes on both within and outside the school once the individual is alive. Lifelong learning means that one continues learning anything or the other until he dies. It may be through formal, non-formal or informal type of educational process.

Literacy Education

Literacy is the ability to read, write and compute with figures. Ani (2010), defined literacy as the skill of transmitting and receiving messages in an intelligible manner in written form. It is the ability to communicate with other persons through reading and writing. The good thing about literacy is that, it helps to deliver people from ignorance, poverty and superstition and engenders social, economic and political emancipation of the people who have it.

Literacy Education

Functional literacy is a combination of literacy skills of reading, writing and numeracy with socio-economic or work oriented skills. It is the application of literacy skills acquired to the improvement of daily living, health care, hygiene, farming or trading. It helps an individual to play an active independent role in society. Functional literacy helps adults to adjust well for economic and social development. It helps the individual to be more productive and more useful to

himself/herself and to the society. It is a part of adult education.

There are two aspects to functional literacy - work-oriented and socio-cultural functional literacy (Ani, 2010)^[4] Work oriented functional adult literacy education teaches literacy for a particular vocation and the skills acquired in that vocation for the individual, learners to improve their working efficiency and increase productivity. It can apply to any occupation one chooses to specialize in. Socio-cultural functional literacy education teaches the learner literacy for socio-cultural matters, such as family life, sanitation, nutrition, religion and civics. These two aspect of functional literacy education must be integrated in order to sustain fully the interest of the learners or participants. Functional adult literacy education helps the adult individual to relate well with his/her work and other people and with the environment of the individual. Functional literacy education helps adults to be less dependent on other people to solve their own problems.

UNESCO (1962)^[23] in Ani (2010)^[4] summarized functional adult literacy as having acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enables a person to engage effectively in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his/her culture or group. The scope of adult and non-formal education are many and varied. It includes basic and post-basic literacy education, mass literacy and continuing education programs, Extra-mural education, liberal education, remedial education, distance and correspondence education, among, others (Akinpelu, 2002)^[3].

Conclusion

For Federal Government of Nigeria to eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria, it must take adult and non-formal education serious. Adult and non-formal education must be adequately funded and given special attention. A nation cannot grow and develop when a greater part of its population are illiterates. What is the hope of the teeming illiterate youths and adults in Nigeria? It is adult and non-formal education. This is because adult education is for immediate use while child education, (which Nigeria is interested in) is futuristic. When an adult acquires knowledge, he/she uses it immediately to solve his or societal problem while it takes a child 15 to 20 years to put his/her knowledge into use.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria should create a federal ministry of adult education and its state equivalent to help tackle most of the challenges posed by increasing adult illiteracy in the county. An adult education professional should be appointed to head such ministry to bring professionalism to bear in it.
2. Government should increase the funding of adult and non-formal education programmes in Nigeria. The UNESCO's 20% benchmark should be adhered to.
3. Serious and massive sensitization campaign should be mounted by the Federal Government of Nigeria to rightly inform the general public of the importance and value of adult and non-formal education in the country. Adult and non-formal education should be given its pride of place in the scheme of things in Nigeria.

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