

# Perspectives and Trends in Adult Education Practice in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *This paper discusses the perspectives and trends in adult education practice in Nigeria viz the Complexity and Evolving Nature of Adult Education; Adult Education and Nations Building; The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) Efforts; Inequalities in the Initiatives towards Free Education in Nigeria; The Non-Encompassing Practices of Adult Education in Nigeria and some workable Recommendations.*

## Introduction

Adult education is the collection of educational opportunities provided to adults in a society to assure their inclusion and intellectual, economic, and social fulfillment. This type of education is still the only one that can cover the holes left by formal schooling in Nigeria. The following characteristics that set adult education apart from primary or secondary school education make this function possible: It can be formal, informal, or non-formal; it acknowledges the wealth of experiences adult learners have; it is evolving to meet their diverse requirements; and it encompasses distant learning, ongoing education, and extracurricular learning. Adult education aims to balance out the disparity between the education gained during childhood and adolescence. Adult education can be summed up as: adult literacy education; all forms of education offered to working men and women, housewives, and other people who, for one reason or another, are willing to improve the quality of their education; Adult education is referred to as extracurricular activities or university extensions; Adult education as fundamental education (learning to read and write) and as being concerned with social welfare, community development, and agricultural extension; Adult education serves as a kind of remedial education, a continuing education, and an update to the adult's prior education; Adult education can also be thought of as industrial or vocational education, the promotion of the use of 3h in education (the head, the hand, and the heart).

## Complexity And Evolving Nature of Adult Education

Existing literature has demonstrated that the phrase "adult education" has varied meanings across contexts and time periods. As a result, how it is conceptualized today differs from how it was in the beginning of its development. Furthermore, no two nations or academics have a clear-cut understanding of the idea. The idea of adult education is frequently more culturally specific and less universal in its utilization. Thus, it is used and conceptualized differently by different nations and programme. Because adult education comprises a variety of educational programmes to fulfill the varied interests of all clienteles, it is imperative that it be seen from several angles.

Despite the fact that there was widespread agreement in 1976 to embrace a single definition and understanding of the concept, trends over the past year have indicated that there are challenges in really putting it into reality. The complexity and evolving nature of adult education as a practice may be to blame for the failure to reach consensus on an appropriate definition. The goal of adult education is to connect learning with people's daily lives, which has significant practical implications. The connection emphasizes the value of education outside of the typical school years. Thus, emphasizing the crucial role that adult education must play in preparing individuals for social reform and change in all countries around the world, regardless of the level of development. Adult education programmes should be a major force in the fight against social injustice, particularly in emerging nations where poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy are rife.

## Adult Education and Nations Building

Because it enables people to become aware, capable of critical thought, and active participants in the change process, adult education in Nigeria has frequently been recognized as a crucial facilitator of progress. However, there is a significant disconnect between the respect accorded adult education and the expectations placed on it in terms of the nation's progress. There are two dimensions to the conceptualization of adult education in Nigeria, thus a quick glance at it will help paint a clearer image of its trajectory and impact evaluation. These are the theoretical and real-world applications. It includes all educational endeavors that aim to reform and rebuild society in order to make it contemporary, productive, participative, and value-driven.

Anyanwu claims that in order to create well-rounded members of Nigerian society, the main change sought from this process is change in people, their attitude, abilities, and knowledge. According to this perspective, adult education is a method for bridging the gap between individual capability and societal demands, as well as a means of advancing a compassionate Nigerian society. Consequently, adult education has a broader focus and encompasses a variety of initiatives and programs, including political and health campaigns, remedial education, open and distance learning, extension education and services, extracurricular studies,

community development, workers' and labor education, industrial training, professional and continuing education, social welfare and social work services, vocational and empowerment training, literacy programs, and more.

The actual or practical perspective, on the other hand, represents how adult education is actually implemented and conceptualized in the real world. Adult education in Nigeria operates in a constrictive manner and is restricted to teaching only the fundamentals of literacy. Operational education encompasses pre- and post-literacy, ongoing education, and vocational training. The Nigerian National Policy on Education, in particular, described adult education as civic, aesthetic, remedial, ongoing, and functional literacy for youth and adults outside the traditional school system.

### **The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult And Non-Formal Education (NMEC) Efforts**

The National Commission for Mass Education (NMEC), the central coordinating agency for adult education in Nigeria, was established as part of the national effort to eradicate illiteracy and was given the responsibility to develop the sectoral blueprint, coordinate, implement, and monitor the various strategies and agencies that are established for the eradication of illiteracy. This serves as further evidence of the restrictive nature of adult education. The Commission was also tasked with expanding and enhancing comprehensive early childhood care and education and with ensuring that all Nigerian children, particularly those from ethnic minorities, had access to free and compulsory primary education. From the foregoing, it can be concluded that while adult education in Nigeria has a more expansive theoretical perspective, its actual implementation is much more constrained and focused on a small set of elements. This has a greater impact on how trends are seen, how policies are developed and implemented in the industry, and how expectations for policies are understood. From a more general theoretical standpoint, it is assumed that adult education has been in Nigeria since the beginning of time, far before the evangelistic efforts of Christian and Muslim religious missionaries. Nigerians participate in group self-help activities for the benefit of individuals and shared community objectives.

The British/Colonial government, however, later realized the importance of literacy for both social and economic progress and hence launched the mass education campaign in 1946. The literacy component of the campaign was designed to help adult Nigerians learn basic literacy for productive socio-political and economic involvement. People and the government were quite enthusiastic about the program when it first started, but the free primary education programs implemented between 1955 and 1957 caused the excitement to wane and drastically reduced government funding. Adult education's role and recognition were not addressed by the Ashby Commission of 1959, but the practice was barely maintained by local governments, particularly those of the Western and Eastern regions, and nonprofit organizations.

### **Inequalities in the Initiatives towards Free Education in Nigeria**

Assuming that Chief Awolowo was elected president of Nigeria, the benefits of compulsory education at all levels, including adult education might have been possible, the people in the Western area had been enjoying would have been available to people in other regions. The regional governments, particularly the western region, were responsible for providing adult education even when the Federal Government of Nigeria wasn't. No one of the numerous National Development Plans since independence in 1960 has offered adult education a clear framework or recognition. The Muhammed/Obasanjo administration was the time when significant efforts were made to develop a national education policy, including adult education. Therefore, the National Policy on Education, which was adopted in 1977 and updated in 1981 and 2004, commits to the eradication of nonliteracy and the promotion of lifelong learning while also ensuring equal access to education, including continuing and further education.

Even at this point, the National Policy on Education prioritized and elevated formal education at the expense of adult and non-formal learning. During the different stages of a country's development, not all facets of the educational system are given the same weight of support. Evidence from the literature indicates that formal education is given greater emphasis and attention than adult and non-formal education in the majority of Sub-Saharan African nations. As a result, policy and resources are focused on it. Meanwhile, the State Agencies for Mass Education (SAMEs) were established in 1980, the National Adult Education Centre in Kano, the Nomadic Education Commission in 1989, the National Commission for Mass Education in 1991, and the National Open University of Nigeria. The Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) was founded in 1971 by a league of adult education practitioners and scholars. Along with numerous extracurricular activities, several educational institutions and individuals are also offering distance learning programs throughout.

In addition, certain other organizations and programmes have been established that, while theoretically directed toward adult education, are really viewed by the government and the administrators of the programs as unrelated to adult education. A graduate with a bachelor's degree in adult education or a comparable field may find it challenging to acquire employment with any of these agencies because of how misinterpreted their perception is. This is most likely a result of the incorrect assumption that credentials from the field of adult education are irrelevant to any employment schedule in such organizations. These organizations include the Michael Imodu Labour Institute, the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the National Orientation Agency, among many others. The Industrial Training Fund (1971), an extra-ministerial institution for continuing education, is one of these organizations.

Although adult education has long been acknowledged as a genuine tool for accelerating meaningful socio-economic and political development in Nigeria, its limited reach has been the bane of the reality of its potentials. In order to suit the developmental requirements of individuals, communities, and the country as a whole, adult education should be flexible in its scope and purpose rather than being sacred. The aim of adult education should be to give people the chance to live in the present within their communities. Through re-orientation and adjustment, it should act as a mechanism for keeping people up to date with progress, giving them the skills to deal with issues as they arise and enabling them to make constructive contributions to the growth of their surroundings, communities, and the country as a whole.

Furthermore, it is evident from a critique of the Nigerian government's commitment to adult education policies that the critical significance of adult education has acquired widespread awareness over time. Adult education in Nigeria now is in much better shape than it was during the colonial and early post-independence periods. This is clear from the repeated educational policies that took adult education programs into consideration. Additionally, numerous institutions and programs that carry out adult education programs or activities have been founded by succeeding Nigerian administrations. Despite this, adult education is generally viewed as a minor component of education in Nigeria and the majority of sub-Saharan African nations without an integrated comprehensive policy, legislation, or framework. In Nigeria nowadays, adult education programs and activities span many different institutions and industries.

There is not a clear and complete policy that unifies all adult education programmes and components like there is in the formal education system, where one ministry is generally in control of every aspect of it. Suffice it to say that initiatives by government that determine the direction of adult education practices are scattered in many Acts that established the various programmes and initiatives. A cursory look will reveal that adult education programmes are often without prior long-term planning and central coordination. Thus, the process of developing regulated and coordinated system of adult education has been made difficult, notwithstanding the efforts of successive governments.

### **The Non-Encompassing Practices of Adult Education in Nigeria**

Even though, the NMEC is seen as the coordinating agency for adult education practice in Nigeria; the over concentration of its focus on literacy (basic and post) have narrow the goal of adult education. In general, there is a strong emphasis on basic and functional reading and education, which is frequently done to promote the implementation of universal primary education and is mostly directed at women and others who did not have a formal education. Additionally, there is a lack of communication and cooperation among the

institutions in Nigeria that offer adult education programmes. Numerous programmes lack interministerial or agency cooperation and are disconnected, loose, and separated from one another.

Little has been accomplished in terms of the practice of adult education beyond the articulation of desired outcomes for policies and programmes. The goal of the policies and the actual capacity of the public institutions are in blatant conflict. In summary, the majority of governmental institutions are not able to provide the population with enough and effective programmes. Due to insufficient money, a lack of physical and educational facilities, a lack of political will, and a lack of provisions for incentives for citizen engagement, many government-sponsored adult education programmes are not operating effectively. In addition to the official's sluggish demeanor, which is largely attributable to their lack of enthusiasm and conviction in adult education as a strategic objective and a tool for fostering national development.

In addition, the majority of adult education policies and programmes are still not part of a comprehensive plan to achieve a national development objective. Obviously, the majority of programmes serve merely as cosmetics, affecting people's perceptions of government concern while doing little to improve the conditions of the targeted group(s). Adult education had never received the attention that formal education had. As a result, adult education is inconsistent and unaddressed all the time since it is not effectively synchronized with other development programmes. Therefore, one of the main obstacles to Nigeria's efforts to escape poverty has been the country's lack of commitment to pursuing or implementing adult education as a strategic framework for national development. Another factor reflecting the low emphasis given to the adult and non-formal sub-sector is the small budgetary allocation allocated to it. The way that the majority of literacy centres are run across Nigeria serves as another telling sign of the marginal status of adult education in that nation. The majority of these government-owned centres are staffed by insufficient and unskilled facilitators, many of whom work part-time and without a thorough understanding of the andragogical principles that underlie adult education practise.

### **Recommendations**

This paper therefore recommends political will, flexible governance, and well-connected and coordinated structures and organisations as more important than ever for adult education. In order to properly address both individual and societal developmental requirements, the scope of the initiative must be expanded beyond the literacy-related elements. Additionally, adult education programmes must be consistent across all governmental institutions and sectors in order to increase sectoral engagement. While adult education policies should be properly connected with other developmental policies, more infrastructure and resources should be mobilised and devoted to the field and practise of

adult education. Additionally, additional adult education specialists should be hired to oversee adult education institutions and programmes.

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