Full Length Research Paper

The roles of Universities in promoting the field of Adult and Non-formal Education

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The paper examines the role of universities in promoting the field of adult education. It sees adult education as tool for human survival and happiness. Adult education, without any doubt, has won considerable ground in establishing itself as perhaps the latest member of the family of intellectual disciplines. The paper takes a look at the concept of adult education, its purposes from one society to another and its components. The paper goes on to ex-ray the concept of non-formal education as any organized systematic learning activity carried on outside the framework of the formal school system. It is of the view of the paper that adult education enjoys good relationship with other disciplines. The paper equally observes that universities play greater roles in promoting the discipline of adult education through theory and practice.

Key words: Adult education, non-formal education.

INTRODUCTION

Adult education has become extremely important for the survival and happiness of humankind. Its fundamental aim is the improvement of the lives of adult learners through the provision of relevant programmes, which enable adult men and women to acquire the knowledge and the skills that they need for meaningful community life. Indeed, it seems to be widely accepted that adult learning is the pathway for people to take full responsibility for their own lives and participate actively in the development of their communities. A review of current research demonstrates the connection of Adult Education with improvements in many social sectors, health, civic engagement, parenting, poverty reduction, well-being or even happiness.

Adult education, as a concept, has, without any doubt, won considerable ground in establishing itself as perhaps the latest member of the family of intellectual disciplines. Since 1950s, it has become a subject of major interest to UNESCO, which has so far organized five international conferences on it (Elsinore, Denmark, 1949; Montreal, Canada, 1960; Tokyo, Japan, 1972; Paris, France, 1985, and Hamburg, Germany – nicknamed “Confintea” – 1995) and several others either on special aspects of the subject or for separate regions of the world. Of special importance among international action on particular aspects of adult education are the UNESCO General Conference of 1964 which launched the Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP; Teheran, Iran, 1965), which gave birth to the concept and practice of functional literacy. Of course, following the lead of UNESCO, several other organisations for the promotion of adult education, of both international status (such as the International Congress of University Adult Education) and of regional status, have come onto the scene. The result of this intense activity in the promotion of adult education is that today there hardly exists government or a university in the Western World, indeed, in the entire world, which does not make some sort of provision for adult education (Okenimkpe, 2004). The discipline has now, in fact, developed to a degree at which it is beginning to claim the distinct terminology of andragogy (Knowles, 1970) as opposed to pedagogy.

About forty-three years ago, John Lowe attested to this fact about the advanced growth of adult education when he wrote that adult educationists were beginning to speak “a new professional language” among themselves and to subscribe to the concept of integrated life-long learning now enunciated by UNESCO, and he referred to the emergence of regional and international associations and journals dedicated to the development of the discipline.
(Lowe, 1970). This is a state of affairs for which adult educationists have every justification for modest pride and satisfaction.

Amazingly, however, there are still innumerable people, both within and outside the university system, whose understanding of what adult education denotes remains hazy. Some think that our students are grey-haired, stooping elders whose curiosity for education penetrates no further than the veneer of initial literacy whereas we recruit our students from the same sources (i.e., the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination, UTME, and diploma holders) from which other departments recruit their own students and mount courses from diploma certificates to the doctorate degree.

Just as the education of children and the youth goes on in any society – conspicuously because formal institutions at various levels are associated with this sector of education – so also does the education of the adult go on in most societies – unhappily, in this case, not so conspicuously (but not any less intensely) because the ways in which this sector of education is carried out are diverse, even diffuse and not so concrete as those of youth education. In local, national and international spheres, learning activities are organized for adults. Various agencies – governmental, non-governmental, voluntary, community-based, the mass media, political parties, the labour movement, the commercial firms, and many others – are continuously organizing learning experiences for adults. Also, the types of adult education, the modes of its offering and the levels at which it is offered are very varied. All of these very diversified, but very intense learning experiences and undertakings constitute adult education. Just as youth education demands the specialized training of its personnel and specialized techniques for its management in various respects, so also does adult education require appropriate training of its manpower and development of relevant management strategies.

This is why adult education establishments – independent or attached to other institutions at various levels – are set up to undertake these tasks of training personnel and developing, monitoring and updating strategies for managing adult education programme.

**Adult Education: Towards a Definition**

The concept of adult education has been defined by scholars from different and varied perspectives. Some of these definitions include the following:

The representatives of 142 countries at the 1976 General Conference of United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) endorses a definition of Adult Education based on a General Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education:

The term ‘Adult Education’ denotes the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level, and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, 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 or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in the two-fold perspectives of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic, and cultural development (in Okenimkpe, 2003).

Earlier, the Report of the First International Congress on Comparative Study of Adult Education in 1969 defined Adult Education as:

A process whereby persons who no longer attend school on a regular and full-time basis (unless full-time programmes are especially designed for adults) 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 problems.

According to Darkenwald and Merriam, (1982), Adult Education could be defined as:

A process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitude, values, or skills. On Karani’s (2000) definition, Adult Education signifies any form of learning undertaken by men and women who no longer go to school on a full time basis. It is based on the need for adults to improve themselves by increasing their knowledge, skills and attitudes through organized learning activities.

The definitions above have all emphasized that adult education is education designed for adults who are not attending a regular school programme and that its purpose is to impart knowledge, skills and appropriate attitudes so as to enable the adult learners to cope with life.

**Purposes of Adult Education**

Adult education has many purposes or goals. The goals differ from one society to another. The following are some general objectives of adult education:

a. Extending opportunities for improved living to all
people of all ages regardless of class, creed, or colour. Thus adult education is for everybody regardless of the length of formal schooling.

b. Supporting and broadening educational backgrounds and giving those who have left school several years ago the chance to regain opportunities which they willingly, or through force or circumstance, gave up when they were young.

c. Preparing for upgrading those regularly employed, thereby increasing the efficiency of the workers on the job and preparing them for the next level of employment in new field;

d. Contributing to the development of individuals and groups, stimulating them to do intelligent, unbiased thinking in order to help them solve the ever increasing political, economic and social problems which confront people everywhere today.

e. Making adults economically more efficient.

f. Making adults aware of their civic responsibilities to one another and to their community, nation and the world.

Components of Adult Education

The scope of adult education is wide as it covers all types of learning situations and activities organized at different levels for adults at different ages. Thus, adult education is for everybody, regardless of the amount of education one has acquired. Just as the illiterate would require a literacy programme, the highly educated would require one form of training or the other, in order to fit into and cope with the changing world. Some programmes of Adult Education comprise: adult basic education, including basic literacy, functional literacy; out-of-school youth programmes; income generating programmes; adult extension programmes, including agricultural extension, community health extension, extra-mural education, and continuing education; distance learning programmes, including correspondence schools and open universities; vocational training; workers' education; civic education; community education; community development; liberal education; life-long education, etc.

What is Non-Formal Education?

Coombs and Ahmed (1974) define non-formal education as any organized, systematic learning activity carried on outside the framework of the formal school system. It addresses the learning needs of particular sub-groups in the population who may be either children or adults. Often it uses participatory, learner-centred approaches and content especially relevant to the learners. It is thus flexible in terms of location, time, materials, methods, learners and providers. Examples of non-formal education include preparation for: apprenticeship, vocational skills training, work and careers; self-employment as well as wage employment, and for entrepreneurship. It also includes adult literacy, remedial classes, extension programmes, and instructions in life skills such as those needed to have healthy families, manage money well, computer literacy, and contributing to and strengthening one's community. Thus Non-formal Education will fall into either of the following two categories:

a). Programmes for out-of-school youth and adults providing education to youth and adults outside the formal education system which do not lead to any value-added paper qualification, that is, to credit or certificates, but that provide the client with functional knowledge and skills for productive work and/or daily living.

b). Educational programmes for out-of-school youth and adults outside the formal system leading to credits, certificates or qualifications. These programmes are provided as alternative educational delivery systems to offer second chance education credits/certificates and qualifications or the opportunity to prepare for return to formal education.

Like formal education, non-formal education is deliberately planned, staffed and financially supported. It is also functional, unrestricted as to time and place, and responds to constant changes in the needs of the individual and the society at large. In fact, as Fordham (1980) would argue, in the context of new development strategies, non-formal education is being viewed as more relevant to the needs of the population, especially for those in the rural areas working in the traditional sector, since it attempts to focus on teaching people to improve their basic level of subsistence and their standards of nutrition and general health. Furthermore, since the non-formal education process usually requires the participation of its recipients in determining the nature and content of the educational programmes, these will always tend to focus on the needs and priorities of the communities.

The Idea of Non-Formal Education

As Fordham (1993) relates, in 1967 at an international conference in Williamsburg USA, ideas were set out for what was to become a widely read analysis of the growing 'world educational crisis' (Coombs 1968). There was concern about unsuitable curricula; a realization that educational growth and economic growth were not necessarily in step and that jobs did not emerge directly as a result of educational inputs. Many countries were finding it difficult (politically or economically) to pay for the expansion of formal education.

The conclusion was that formal educational systems had adapted too slowly to the socio-economic changes...
around them and that they were held back not only by their own conservatism, but also by the inertia of societies themselves. If we also accept that educational policy making tends to follow rather than lead other social trends, then it followed that change would have to come not merely from within formal schooling, but from the wider society and from other sectors within it. It was from this point of departure that planners and economists in the World Bank began to make a distinction between informal, non-formal and formal education. (Fordham 1993).

**Dimensions of Adult Education**

In practical, real-life terms, and for purposes of its academic study, we can conceive of adult education in five dimensions:

i. Meaning and Foundations: Definition; History; Philosophy; Concepts and Theories; Psychology; Sociology, and Principles of Organisation and Teaching.

ii. Programmes: Design; Evaluation; Policy and Administration; Teaching Methodology.

iii. Contents: Literacy; Remedial; Vocational; Leisure, and Foundation.

iv. Delivery Approaches: Face-to-Face in various platforms; Distance and Correspondence Education, and Mass Media.

v. Ancillaries and Providing and Supporting Institutions.

**Relationship between Adult Education and Other Disciplines**

Adult education enjoys good relationship with other disciplines like languages, social sciences, natural sciences, engineering, management sciences, law and medicine. The discipline of adult education accommodates all categories of adult learners who seek improvement in their various areas of specializations through any modes. This writer, for example, is engaged in how adult of all categories (in private and public sectors) can achieve communicative competence in the official language of English.

**The Roles of Universities in promoting Adult Education**

The universities have been involved in training of adult educators through well-designed curricula that ensures professionalization of adult education. Professionalization involves the movement of the field towards desired standards of educational preparation or training and competency. The universities embark on degree programmes that train professionals to be competent in the principles (theories) and practice of adult education. To ensure standards in the nobel professional field, the Nigerian government through the National University Commission (NUC) empowers this commission to lay down minimum academic standards for the universities in the federation and to accredit their degree and other academic awards. The universities ensure proper training of the wide range of teaching and non teaching staff in Adult Education. They are equally involved in giving principles and practical ideas to assist professionals and would be professional (students) to improve their professional competence in all teaching learning enterprise. The universities also engage in research and publications as well as conferences, seminars, symposia which are geared towards improving the standard of adult education practice.

Specifically, universities carry out the following functions:

1. Radical Curriculum Reforms taking cognizance of new societal and technological developments. This goes with matching instructional contents to the demands of society especially of the productive sectors of emergent Nigeria.

2. Providing avenue for pre-university education for prospective adult education through make-up or remedial courses at certificate and diploma levels. This has been in operation in some universities but efforts could still be geared towards its improvement.

3. Developing continuing education programmes for various professionals in all sector. This will not only showcase and popularize but also acquaint the general public about the benefits of adult education. At present, many people are not aware of adult education benefits in staff development and advancement.

4. Establishment of Department of Adult Education is another role universities can play in promoting adult education. It is evident that not all universities in the country run a Department of Adult Education and the establishment of this Department would go a long way in promoting the discipline.

5. Universities’ consultancy services in the area of training and retraining (Human Capacity Development) should be exclusively handled by the Department of Adult Education.

6. Regular staff development programme for adult educators. Adult education staff should be encouraged and supported to purpose knowledge and be enriched through cross-fertilization of ideas and issues in adult education. This can better be done by releasing and funding staff to attend seminars, conferences and other training programme.

**CONCLUSION**

The fundamental aim of adult education is the improvement of the lives of adult learners through the provision of relevant programmes that will enable adult men and women to acquire the requisite knowledge and
skills crucial for not only living a meaningful and fulfilling community life but also negotiating the complex contours of modern life. Indeed, there is a firm link between Adult Education and the vital improvements that adult learners could make in their nation's social sectors, health, civic engagement, parenting, poverty reduction, and their own well-being and happiness. The discipline of adult education stems from the overall goal of education which is meant to change learners positively. Adult education has its dimensions which makes it a unique discipline. The universities play greater roles in promoting the discipline of adult education through training, research and ensuring standards.

REFERENCES