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## Repositioning Conceptual Understanding of Adult Education for Social Transformation in Nigeria

**Okafor, Ikechukwu M.**

Dept of Arts Education  
Faculty of Education,  
Federal University, Otuoke  
Bayelsa State, Nigeria

**Arikawei, Apuega R.**

Dept of Educational Foundations  
Faculty of Education  
Niger Delta University  
Wilberforce Island  
Bayelsa State, Nigeria  
Tel: +2348033290270; +2348035008132

### Abstract

The conceptual understanding of Adult Education and its mission has continued to suffer much neglect in various quarters in the education sector. The debate on the status of the discipline has been accorded low esteem and relegated to the background in government circles, in the intellectual community and public perception despite the huge potentials it offers in the developmental process. This paper is an attempt at repositioning the understanding of Adult Education to restore the image of poor perception from policy makers and implementers of adult education programmes in Nigeria. The paper examined the utilitarian value of adult education needed for the transformation of the plethora of problems in the economic, social and political landscape of society. It recommended that there is need to redesign adult education curriculum to sustain its nomenclature for lifelong learning to bring about the needed recognition as a career discipline in the education system for maximum benefit in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Repositioning, Conceptual, Understanding, Social, Transformation, Adult Education

## Introduction

Adult education is a broad field of education that covers different areas of human learning. The basic tenet of adult education is the conviction that learning should not be restricted to a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Adult education has over the years played a key role in changing the lives of different societies. Through adult education, many adults have found their way onto different paths of learning and have made up for lost time by discovering their potential and skills, achieving things they never knew they could achieve.

Tracing Adult Education back in African traditional background takes us back to functional role it played in the traditional African society where it was used to secure the survival of the community. Wrapped in the survival drive were the community's qualities, profound morality, ability procurement and different types of preparing. All the more critically, adult education at that point was a deep-rooted procedure that was utilized by conventional foundations of Higher Education to guarantee that every community consistently made and safeguarded its class of 'savant lords'. Like the remainder of customary training, adult education was basically culture-pushed and network based. It was a significant scaffold between the past and the present with a bus to what's to come. It is in this feeling one can portray it as being conventional.

Adult education is a form of learning or education that adults engage in beyond traditional schooling, and covers the basic literacy to personal fulfilment as a lifelong learner. Adult education fathoms such different modes as autonomous examination intentionally sought after with or without the guide of libraries; communicate projects or correspondence courses; bunch exchange and other "common guide" learning in study circles, colloquia, workshops and private gatherings and full-or low maintenance study in classes or courses in which the speaker, educator, or coach has a formal driving job.

Although adult education is as old as man both as a body of knowledge and a field of study, there appears to be widespread misconceptions in understanding its content and programmes. According to Ezimah (2004) adult education is wrongly conceived as being synonymous with literacy education (reading, writing and numeracy) solely designed for the education of the old and aged adult illiterates. This misconception appears to be more pronounced in the developing countries where there is widespread level of illiteracy.

One fundamental reason for the widespread misconception of adult education could be attributed to ignorance on the utilitarian value of the subject matter. Most people especially in developing countries like Nigeria are yet to come to terms with the true concept of adult education and what it will offer to the society as a discipline. For this reason, Ezimah (2004) observed that adult education in a developing milieu can best be described as a weeping willow in misplaced priorities. Its concept has over the years continued to suffer relegation in various quarters in the developing countries.

Adult education is misconceived even among the intellectuals, educational managers and political leaders. The misconception arose to the extent that its developmental potentials are yet to be effectively harnessed. This may not be unconnected to the display of illiteracy which is bound to affect the planning and development of educational policies of the countries. This situation could result to educational imbalance accounting for the reduction in the economic, social, educational and political development of such nations. This is evident as the wealth of any nation is not only measured on the strength of its economy but also on the literacy parameters of the citizens.

The most alarming misconception is perhaps, the name adult education itself. It is glaring that the conceptual nomenclature of adulthood has been misconstrued by both practitioners, stakeholders and the government. The term “adult” is seen by most persons in various quarters as a reference point to old people and so, the education of such group of individuals are of no use to the society. This scenario more than anything reinforced the growing misconception of adult education as the proper name as a field study. However, adult education as a lifelong learning has no boundaries and all-inclusive as learning could not have age boundary or social barriers.

### **Conceptualizing Adult Education**

Adult education has been defined by several authors, and each definition is based on the philosophical perspective of the author. For example, Chijioko (2010) defined adult education as “the practice of teaching and educating adults. This often happens in the workplace, through 'extension' or 'continuing education' courses at secondary schools, at a college or university. Other learning places include folk high schools, community colleges, and lifelong learning centres. The practice is also often referred to as ‘Training and Development.’

According to Ouane (2009), adult learning and education is now more than ever emerging as an empowering tool capable of liberating and harnessing the creative forces of people, potential of communities and the wealth of nations in a situation of global crisis. As a lifelong learning context, adult education is an inclusive education that emphasizes self-esteem, empowerment, citizenship-building community organization, labour skills, income generations and even poverty alleviation. Nigeria and indeed many African countries are currently faced with daunting challenges of reducing unemployment, eradicating poverty, poor health conditions, preventing and resolving conflicts, insecurity and integrating smoothly into the main stream of the world economy (Seya, 2005). Adult education is not only relevant in the economic and social spheres. It plays a very significant contribution in strengthening democracy. For democracy to thrive effectively, adult education is needed to educate citizens on the democratic culture as well as inform them of their rights and responsibilities as democracy requires people to actively participate at local, national and global levels (Seya, 2005).

Reddy (2000) postulated “adult education as part time or full time education for men and women of all ages either organized by themselves or provided by schools, learning centres, or other agencies which enable them to improve their general or professional knowledge, skills and abilities by either continuing their education or resuming their initial or incomplete education of previous years”. While Mohanthy (1989) pioneered the concept of lifelong education, he stressed the concept of lifelong education because of its relevance to the present set up of society. He categorically stated that the term, education, should be more functional, relevant and recurrent. Accordingly, he opined that education bridges the past with the present and the future makes an individual learn continuously.

Rogers (1992) opined that adult education comprises “all planned and purposeful learning opportunities offered to those who are recognized and recognize themselves as adults in their own society and who left the formal (initial education system or who have passed beyond the possible state of initial education if they were not in it), whether such learning opportunities treat the learners as adults in decision making, use of appropriate adult learning methodology and style and purpose and to meet their own need”. As stated earlier, the concept and understanding of adult education is an issue based on the society and so different conceptual

understanding. In a developing nation, where high rate of illiteracy, political thuggery, religious intolerance, youth restiveness, high unemployment among others abound.

The parameter, concept and definition will attempt to accommodate phenomenal problems. Touh Send-Cole (1977), quoted in Hassan and Oyebamiji (2012) reflected that adult education embraces all forms of educative experience needed by men and women according to their varying interests' and requirements in their different levels of comprehension and ability and in their changing roles and responsibilities throughout life. While Nzeneri (2002) postulated adult education as education undertaken by adults who need to make up for what they lost in the formal school system or for those who desire to use their leisure more meaningful or people who need to acquire new and improved skill in order to adjust to changes and challenges in technology and or occupation. Therefore, it is the adult of today who holds the destiny of their nations in their hands and not the children.

Sharan and Brockett (2007) were more concerned with distancing or differentiating it from child education. Hence, they see adult education as 'a practice in which adults engage in systematic and sustained self-educating activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values.' UNESCO (1976) defined adult education "as the entire body of organized process whatever the content, level or method, formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, college and universities as well as apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults 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 behaviour in the two fold perspectives of full personal development". Seya (2014) gave a more comprehensive definition of adult education, viewing it as a transmission process of general, technical or vocational knowledge, as well as skills, values and attitudes, which takes place out of the formal education system with a view to remedying early education inadequacies of mature people or equipping them with the knowledge and cultural elements required for their self-fulfilment and active participation in the social, economic and political life of their societies. The role of adult education in filling the lapses caused by lack or inadequate early education is the main purpose of adult education. Education on its own is a path to enlightenment. It plays a key role in improving the functional role of individuals in a community.

### **The Early Efforts of Adult Education in Nigeria**

Since the introduction of adult education in Nigeria, the development has been rather too slow. As far back as the 14th Century, itinerant Islamic scholars and traders in the Muslim north of the country taught Arabic literacy through the study of the Koran. Later, Christian missionaries brought Western education to parts of southern and central Nigeria. The Christian missionaries on reaching Nigeria as from 1842, undertook the burden of literacy education in order to advance their evangelical efforts by assisting converts in reading the Bible, Prayer Books and other religious pamphlets.

In the 20th century, the British colonial government made effort to provide some adult education programme in Nigeria. In its 1925 Memorandum on Education Policy in British Tropical Africa, the British Colonial office recommended the implementation of an adult education in Nigeria, Omolewa (1981).

Irrespective of the efforts to educate the Nigerian citizens through pedagogical and androgical, Fasokun (1981) identifies certain causes of adult illiteracy in Nigeria to include among others:

- Problems in primary education (low enrolment rates, high dropout rates, inadequate facilities, poor teaching / learning materials, irrelevant curriculum);
- Poor enrolment rates in adult literacy programmes,
- High dropout rates linked both to economic problems which force adult learners to abandon classes in favour of income generating activities.
- Literacy instructors not properly trained in facilitation skills and gender awareness,
- The exclusion of women from adult education programmes;
- Higher drop-out rates among women due to irrelevant curricula and competing demands;
- Poor access to adult education for “hard” to reach communities, such as nomads, fishermen, and pastoralistic;
- Failure to sustain literacy rates due to poor resources;

A remarkable effort in the history of adult education in Nigeria was the introduction of mass literacy campaign in 1946 by the British colonial government. This programme gave room for adults to get the basic educational foundation which would help them function properly in their societies. Despite this development, the rate at which the programme progressed was rather slow. The level of adult illiteracy was on the increase undermining the pace of human development.

Consequently, life-long learning as an aspect of adult education starts from birth to death. (Field 2001, Aspin, D. N. & Chapman 2007) postulated life-long learning to refer to the activities people perform throughout their life time to improve their knowledge, skills and competence in a particular field, given some personal, societal or employment related motives.

Lifelong learning is not a provision of a formal parameter of learning but providing second chances to update basic skills and also offering learning opportunities at more advanced levels. All this means that formal system of provision needs to become much more open and flexible, so that such opportunities can truly be tailored to the needs of the learner, or indeed the potential learner (European Commission, 2007).

It literally implies that learning should take place at all stages of life cycle (from the cradle to the graves) and in more recent version that it should be life-wide, that is embedded in all life contexts from the school to the workplace, the home and the community. The learning society therefore, is the vision of a society where there are recognized opportunities for learning for every person wherever they are and however old they should be (Green, A. 2002). He opined that it is a continuous building of skills and knowledge during one’s life that occurs throughout experience faced life time.

Globally, development cannot take place without education especially basic literacy. Development, therefore, requires a transformed mind (Adekola&Abanum, 2010). Aderinoye (2004) cited in Adekola and Abanum (2010) stated that difference between the developed and undeveloped countries of the world is related to the level of literacy among the populace. Social transformation becomes the catalyst for social development of man, elimination of poverty, ignorance and social development.

The **Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE)** was set up in 1971, and it became the champion of the cause of adult education practice in Nigeria. The body recorded modest achievements over the year and became a turning point in the planning, execution and

assessment of adult and non-formal education programmes. Specifically, the NNCAE act as a driving force for the advocacy for government recognition to incorporate adult education at various levels of the educational framework especially at the colleges of education and university.

An important change came in 1990 when the Federal Military Government established the **National Commission for Mass Education (NMEC)**, responsible for the organisation, monitoring and assessment of adult literacy practices in the country. The commission's activities are decentralised, with offices in the six geo-political zones of the country, the 36 states and all 774 local government areas (Fasokun&Pwol 2008)

Another significant step taken to improve the literacy programme in the country was the launch of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in September 1999 after the country's return to democracy. This program was inclusive of the primary, junior secondary and adult school programmes. Nigeria's 2004 **National Policy on Education** placed great emphasis on adult and non-formal education and focused on the education of marginalised groups, including nomads and migrants, girls and women, street children and the disabled. As before, federal agencies are responsible for policy and for the implementation of adult and non-formal education (Fasokun&Pwol 2008).

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

Nigeria is the most populous black nation in the world. Nigeria adult literacy rate was at level of 59.6 % in 2015, up from 51.1 % in 2008 (Knoema.com), which signifies that a lot of work has to be done. However, adult education in Nigeria has played a pivotal role in the standard of education in Nigeria. This form of education has, no doubt, also uplifted the literacy level in the country. There is plethora of challenges facing adult education as a form of education in Nigeria.

Adult Education in Nigeria may not be keeping pace with dynamic social challenges embracing the nation. Although education in general is supposed to be responsive to social challenges, Nigerian education planners lack the conscientious effort of exposing the adult education potentials in a developing nation (Akubuilu, Okorie, Onwuka, &Uloh, 2014). This issue of planning has been a big problem since the departure of the white man after the colonial era. The leaders of the country have not done well in ensuring a well-designed and well implemented curriculum.

Literacy instructors not properly trained in facilitation skills and gender awareness is another problem facing the implementation of adult education in Nigeria. The level of illiteracy and backwardness in education sector in general has had this factor to blame. There are many half-baked teachers who in turn either not take the process of education serious or totally don't know how to go about effective teaching. There is also the problem of lack of gender awareness. This is largely due to the cultural outline of the country.

About 40 million Nigerians need to acquire adult education for the nation to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 according to the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan (Tayo, 2013) The exclusion of women from adult education programmes makes realization of this goal unrealistic or impossible even till this day. The population of women born against the population of men is significantly larger. Hence the slogan "develop the woman, develop the nation". The inclusion of women in education and adult education in particular should be upheld and encouraged.

There is also failure to sustain literacy rates due to poor resources, including equipment, material and teachers, donor dependency and a negative perceived value of education. Of course, the incidence of lack of educational materials, resources, and teachers is nothing new. Each administration that comes along, sadly, has done little or nothing to help this issue. There is now usually an overdependence on donations from NGOs and individuals which has also in a way supported the negative perception of education.

### **Adult Education and the Future of Education in Nigeria**

Despite the problems that laden education in general and particularly, adult education in Nigeria, there is enough room and space for improvement. If improved upon, adult education will help in fostering learning in Nigeria. Movement into other areas of learning is a significant result of adult education. There is a clear proof that (effective) commitment in learning gives motivating force to further learning. Manninen (2010) found that 93 percent of course members said that their cooperation has persuaded them to find out more. Further, students depicted their advancement by alluding to reality exercises they could now do in a wide assortment of life settings (regular and recreation practice, work) network and instructive practice). Fearlessness, discovering voice and opening up to learning were distinguished by practically all students and appeared to be integral to their point of view on learning. These results gave improvement in the nature of their lives and become part of their student character.

Adult education has a way of changing peoples' attitude and perception to things. A person who takes an interest in adult learning may vary from the person who does not in terms of earlier frame of mind. It was found (Feinstein et al, 2003) that adult learning is related with progressively "receptive" points of view on race and specialist, more noteworthy comprehension of individuals from various foundations, testing recently held convictions and with a continuing impact on non-extremist sees. Particularly scholastic arranged courses are most appropriate for opening personalities and by and large interface adult learning to expanded racial resilience, a decrease in political scepticism and a higher tendency towards fair frames of mind.

### **Need to Reposition Adult Education for Social Transformation in Nigeria**

The future of adult education, though vague due to present political, social and economic circumstances of the country could be seen as promising. Akubulo, et al (2014) outlined five future anticipated for adult education in Nigeria.

1. Explosion of information and the convenient need of adult education administrations which would no longer be able to be suited in domain of conventional learning; focuses request the consideration of instructive organizers.
2. Innovation headways and the pace of availability between learning suppliers and learning networks have made adult education alluring. Nigeria's Open University is starting to understand the huge open door that could be mined through separation instructive contributions that are focused on, to explicit gatherings now predominant for some low implementation associations. Learning could be gotten non-concurrently regardless of time and spot. The number getting education through adult education frameworks are probably going to dwarf those in customary homerooms.
3. The numbers are tremendous and incorporate nearly the youthful and the old of Nigeria's over expanding populace of more than 150 million. Individuals are starting to

comprehend that training is a long-lasting procedure; furthermore, adult education buys in completely to this way of thinking.

4. There is a need to more likely instruct the populace that adult education offering is fit for the populace. Numerous Nigerians still accept that education is age explicit. Nigeria should investigate American Educational System that unites students in casual learning focusing both in the formal and casual settings such as found in the advanced education and network learning focuses.
5. The method of educational conveyance will proceed to extend and be separated by its occasions and geological position. There is a need to veer off from Nigeria's fixed educational plans to dynamic issues that grasp the nation on the loose.

Adult populace forms the human resources for the development of any country. Adults may not function effectively and efficiently if not given the pre-requisite education. In this scenario, an existing adult education is in place but requires repositioning to meet the global and universal trends. Most of the manpower (adults) of the country are either unskilled, semi-skilled or none at all. The few skilled and highly skilled adults are threatened by obsolete due to the fast-growing technological changes in the work place environment (Eyibe 2005). Many ICT skills have not been mastered by many Nigerian adults and youths who ought to apply them in their day-to-day activities. This ugly scene therefore, calls for the repositioning of adult education through the inclusion of ICT in adult education programmes in Nigeria Anyanwu (2010).

Since no sustainable development in any world can be achieved without people, it becomes imperative that adult education curriculum be repositioned for national transformation through the entrenchment of peace education. Adult and non-formal education is a productive human development investment. Thus, financing adult and non-formal education is an investment to human development that produces benefits. Some of these benefits are listed by Okech (2004) citing UNESCO (1997) which states; there is now robust evidence that human capital is a key determinant to economic benefits and emerging evidence indicates that it is also associated with a wild range of non-economic benefits such as better health and well-being. Investment in human capital and, by implication, education has thus moved to the centre stage of strategies to promote economic prosperity, fuller employment and social cohesion in countries.

These according to Hassan (2009) will reposition adult learning and participation. The Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) in its Annual Meeting on 5th December, 2006 held in Calabar advocated and urged the Federal Ministry of Education not to merge unrelated parastatals together. This is with a view to repositioning adult education as a full ministry in other to take its national position in developing the country.

Globally, education is a transformational mechanism which phenomenon is all round development: socially, economically, politically, culturally, spiritually and religiously. Agboeze (2014), apt that education is a process of transforming a person positively through training, teaching and learning to acquire knowledge and skill. Accordingly, Nzeneri (2008) states adult education as any education given to adults on their social, political, cultural and economic needs and problems to enable them adjust fully to changes and challenges in their lives and society. This shows the dynamic nature of adult education. Adult learners are not homogeneous and any application of a new transformational model or process should be adapted for individual differences. Knowles, Elwood & Swanson (2015). The dynamics of



adult education lies in its potentials of social transformation to individual beneficiaries in character, skills, literacy, political participation and community development activities. It transforms adults to a “whole being”.

Adult education has an indirect impact on the young people because it transforms the orientation of education in adults or older people. This re-orientation is transferred afterwards to the younger generation. The current administration is giving local government greater financial autonomy from the state government. This autonomy should be used as a means to boost grassroot adult education transformation programme to reach the crevices of the society. Education on every state for every individual and family should be the goal of every government in power. Therefore, it should be taken as a task that must be done, and all hindrances and impediments should be taken off.

### **Perception of Adult Education**

Adult education is as old as man itself. It has been available long before the formal school system came to be. Akinpelu (1988) stated “that if one accepts the Bible story of the Garden of Eden, Adam, the first student was already an adult at creation and was instructed directly by his creator outside the school system”. This is the foundation of adult education.

In 1959, the Ashby Commission was set up to determine Nigerian’s human resources needs vis-a-vis the country’s secondary and higher levels of education for a period of twenty years; 1960 – 1980 (Nwadiani 2004). Nigeria till date still remains one of the developing nations of the World due to social, economic and political factors like unemployment, over population, illiteracy among others. Okedara et al (2001) noted that whether narrowly conceived as adult literacy (functional or not), the extension of elementary schooling to the masses, or whether more widely as incorporating extension is based on nationally identified need rather than any individual wants. On the above definitions, it is clear that adult education is an organized educational process which equips the adult learners’ abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications as well as turn them in a new direction in order to bring about changes in their attitudes.

Consciously, it can be perceived that there are career opportunities for adult education graduates considering the fact that every society especially developing societies like Nigeria requires organized educational processes that would impact meaningfully on the learners in order to be self-relevant. Adult education gainfully enables or equips adult learners in all these national identified needs in order for them to free their minds from factors or agents militating against the growth of a nation.

Adult education is perceived as a discipline that provides its client with various career opportunities in order for them to be useful to themselves and the society. It shapes public perception on the career developmental choice that are available in the field so that adults can fully gain their pride of place in the society and as a result promote development. Adult education provides immediate viable solution-solving mechanism unlike the formal school where the clients will wait for a “Largess” without immediate solution from their knowledge and learning.

### **Conclusion**

Adult education even though has a long history, its conceptual meaning has not been properly understood in developing counties especially in Africa. This is due to lack of understanding and the plethora of problems associated with awareness, funding and poor policy planning

and implementation of adult education programmes. Meanwhile, Adult education has the potential to improve the life of a number of persons especially if properly planned and implemented in society. It is therefore important for its goal, mission and practice to be standardized in the modus operandi to bring about change in people's attitude to reposition the subject matter as a discipline. This will go a long way in the crusade to fight against illiteracy, improve human capital development and bring about societal transformation in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations are hereby put forward:

- i. There is need to redesign the adult education curriculum to sustain its nomenclature for qualitative lifelong learning to bring about the needed recognition as a career discipline in the education system for maximum benefit in Nigeria.
- ii. Proper funding of adult education programmes should be encouraged by government and other stakeholders to make the impact of the discipline felt.
- iii. The policies of the government should be designed in such a way that there would be glaring benefits of adult education in the educational atmosphere of the country.
- iv. There is overemphasis of certification. The government should aim at giving thorough education to the masses and not to uphold the orientation of education for certification.
- v. Professionals and well qualified adult educators only should be employed to teach in adult education programmes in the country.
- vi. Education in Nigeria is so broad that the ministry of education might not oversee the affairs properly. There's therefore a need that Ministry of Adult Education be created to take over the administration of Adult education programmes in Nigeria.

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