ASSESSMENT OF STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the concepts of adult literacy and its prominent position in the hallmark of education. It gives an overview of adult literacy in Nigeria, its relevance and outlines its components. The paper assessed strategies to improve adult literacy programmes. Finally, the paper concludes by recommending that adult educators should seek ways to adequately utilize the strategies of improving Adult literacy programmes and Government should be involved in literacy programmes from inception to finish.

Keywords: Adult Literacy

Introduction

The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10th December 1945 by the General Assembly of the United Nations has increased the awareness and emphasis on eradication of illiteracy. Nwafor & Agi (2013) asserted that the Article 26 of the document explicitly states that: "Everyone has the right to education". By implication, the statement is all inclusive – male and female, old and young. From the above, education is a right availed to be acquired and enjoyed by every citizen, irrespective of age, social status or sex. Consequently, education is accepted as a driving force for socio-economic and political development vis-à-vis the well-being of the individuals continued to receive global attention at different times. Since education in all its ramifications is the legal right of all citizens, it is therefore imperative that those, who for whatever reason(s) are educationally disadvantaged should not be denied their inalienable right to formal education, which begins with basic literacy.

According to Nwafor & Agi (2013), in Nigeria, there are many who are yearning and yawning for opportunities to acquire literacy skills that would enhance both their living conditions and statuses. The authors further posited that majority of the people in this category are mainly the rural dwellers, especially the peasant farmers and some artisans and technicians in the urban areas. From the category of those listed as the educationally disadvantaged, are adults in their respective society.

The number of illiterate adults keeps growing despite efforts from governmental and non-government agencies to curb it. According to Chieke, Madu & Ewelum (2017), each year, an estimated 2.3 million persons join the pool of those 23 million adults considered to be

functionally illiterate. The literacy situation in Africa as analysed by UNESCO as reported in Nwafor & Agi (2013), shows that Nigeria's literacy level is 49%, more so, World Bank's report (2010), has it that Nigeria's male adult literacy rate is 71.9%, i.e., those who aged 15 and above, and who can read and write simple statement in their daily life activities. To address this situation, an appropriate step would be to re-emphasis adult literacy with renewed vigour and practical actions. While looking for strategies of improving adult literacy, it is pertinent to define adult literacy. Adult literacy according to Nwafor & Agi (2013) has to do with the ability of an individual adult (man or woman) to read, write and communicate in known language(s), as well as the ability to do basic mathematical computations far beyond basic literacy level (

Ani as cited in Chieke, et al (2017), opined that the federal government also directed all the states of federation to establish agencies for adult and non-formal education. This, they did as a strategy to the eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria on or before the year 2000 and promote the level of adult literacy. The establishment of the commission has served as a platform where other agencies and organisations tend to draw their goals and objectives while addressing adult literacy. Although this step has been in motion, since the establishment of National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education by decree no. 17 of 1990 as part of the activities for the celebration of international literacy year, there has been little or no viable improvement. Thus, this paper tries to conceptualize adult literacy, it examines strategies to improve adult literacy programmes and make some recommendations to promote Adult Literacy in Nigeria.

Adult Literacy

Adult literacy is an integral part of the concept of literacy. By implication, it is an aspect of literacy which tends to promote the literacy of adults. In Nigeria, an adult is a person who is eighteen years and above, and who is mentally, physically, socially and psychologically mature. Adult literacy is an important factor in development, both as a contributing factor to economic growth and (in the form of ‘‘literacy rates’’) as a development indicator (UNESCO 2006; UNDP 2015).

Yusuf, Ladan, Idris & Halilu (2013) reported that adult literacy provision in colonial Nigeria was dominated by Christian missionaries whose principal intention was to promote religious literacy. While the northern part of the country was served by Quranic schools and Islamic clerics serving as facilitators who exposed learners to Arabic literacy, the southern part of the country had the Christian missionaries who exposed the people to Western education. The British colonial governments eventually took over from the missionaries when the Colonial Officer recommended a national literacy campaign in its memorandum on Education Policy in British Tropical Africa in 1946. Between 1952 and 1960 independence of Nigeria, the regional governments initiated policies aimed at developing their education sectors in their domains. For instance, the Western and Eastern regional governments initiated Universal Primary Education (UPE), and the Northern regional government opted for free primary and adult literacy as a strategy in their war against ignorance. In view of the above, Itasanmi, Akintolu and Oni (2021) agreed that the stated efforts constituted the bedrock for adult literacy development in the country after independence.

.In line with foregoing, Nwafor & Agi (2013) defined adult literacy as a tool that can equip the individual to improve himself intellectually, to empower himself economically, and to make himself socially and politically relevant. With this tool, the mutually reinforcing trinity of poverty, illiteracy and gender inequality can be drastically reduced to the barest minimum. It is in recognition of this that Hinzen (2006) observed that: adult literacy is the fertilizer needed for development and democracy to take root and grow and it is the invisible ingredient in any successful strategy for eradicating poverty and achieving gender equality. Adult literacy should be seen as a continuous process that requires regular and sustained learning. Hence, adult literacy forms the basis of functionality of an individual that would ensure life-long learning process.

The reasons for greater emphasis on adult literacy are glaring as it relates to the rate of illiteracy in the nation. Adult literacy programmes where it is well-planned and effectively implemented would motivate knowledge-hungry adults to aspire to greater heights in academics and vocational training; a situation that ultimately engenders lifelong education. Adult literacy programmes could ensure the achievement of larger community initiatives, and equally serve as a component of an all-out attack on poverty and other social conditions that result in undesirable community problems. Finally, adult literacy could help its recipients to be gainfully employed and earn higher income and higher status. In fact, it will help its beneficiaries to make use of the computer, internet and e-mail for more information and connections.

Components of Adult Literacy Programme

According to Nwafor & Agi (2013) the adult literacy programme that would ensure functionality has the following components:

Reading; i.e., ability to read up to a particular grade level;

Writing; i.e., the ability to write clearly and reasonably in a particular language;

Mathematics; "Numeracy" or the ability to perform basic mathematical operations needed in daily life.

English as a second or other language (ESOL): The teaching of English speaking, listening, reading and writing skills to those for whom it not a native language.

Cultural literacy; Being familiarized with the background knowledge of the cultural heritage of one's society.

Ezimah (2004), opined that adult literacy programme can be categorized into two: basic adult literacy and functional adult literacy programmes. The Basic Adult Literacy Programme is mainly designed to arm or furnish the students with the rudimentary skills of reading, writing and computation through the use of the local languages, especially in the mother tongue. The objective here is to equip the learners with basic skills of communication and understanding of their environment. On the other hand, functional adult literacy programmes combine both the teaching of literacy, numeracy and vocational skills. The objective is to equip recipients with skills and knowledge that could make them employable and useful in other spheres of life on completion of training.

Another fundamental component of adult literacy programmes is partnership. Adult literacy programme typically seeks numerous partnerships for it to achieve it purpose of establishment. It is not

uncommon for these partnerships to include a variety of players among which are public libraries, bookstores, public schools, vocational rehabilitation programmes, immigrant and refugee support groups, legal organizations, corporations, senior citizen agencies, religious groups, correctional institutions, local media, colleges, restaurants, labour unions, and social service agencies. As a component of a formidable adult literacy programmes, partnerships are very important. Adult literacy difficulties affect the community; therefore the community should be involved in helping literacy programmes address the low literacy skills of their participants. This implies that diversity in partnerships is critical. Adult literacy programmes that reflect all every facet of a community or society at large can put literacy on the government and business agenda better than anyone literacy programme acting alone.

Corroborating the aforementioned, the Partners serve a variety of roles: financial support, publicity, and as a source of volunteers. A variety of partners can help literacy programmes serve a diverse group of students. More so, corporations with partners play a critical role for adult literacy programmes by providing money, in-kind donations (e.g., software, materials, and supplies), learner referrals, fundraising assistance, equipment, and volunteers.

Strategies for Improving Adult Literacy Programmes

No matter the importance of adult literacy to individual and national development, it still remains at low ebb. One of the major reasons for this pitfall is the strategies adopted in planning and implementing adult literacy programmes in Nigeria. For this reason, Nwafor & Agi (2013) observed that adult literacy programmes should

take place in the context of development or livelihood activities. In respect of the above, Hinzen (2006) postulated that literacy can best be learned by adults through a highly contextual, even individualized programme in which the literacy learners are engaged in doing their own daily life literacy activities "learning by doing" rather than "learning in preparation for doing", or… "breaking out of the education silo into …" a "literacy second" model, a programme starting with a developmental activity and including informal literacy learning within it. This type of adult literacy programme makes the participants useful to themselves as well as the larger society. In effect, adult literacy programme should not take a single model, rather it should be diversified. It could be argued that a "one-size-fits all programme" can be a recipe for failure.

In line with the foregoing, Chieke, et al (2017) while addressing factors that contribute to the success of adult literacy programmes in Nigeria identified some strategies which can be likened to improve adult literacy:

Personnel: On this factor, Chieke, et al (2017) opined that agencies working for adult literacy education in Nigeria should be well staffed; staffed with trained professionals in adult education. They further maintained that their staff should be well equipped with special skills to teach adults. The use of primary school teachers who have little or no knowledge in adult education as instructors in adult literacy programmes is putting square pegs in round holes. According to them adults should be taught with the theory of "Andragogy (a learning strategies focused on adults)" in mind. It is often interpreted as the process of engaging adult learners with the structure of learning experience. By implication,

when the right personnel are used in piloting the affairs adult literacy programmes, the programme achieves possible results.

Funding: Funding of adult literacy programmes is one major strategy needed to achieve a successful outcome of the programmes in Nigeria. To support the above, Chieke, et al (2017) observed that every aspects of adult literacy programmes require money for execution, for instance, production of reading materials, distribution of reading materials, curriculum development, instructional material, training and remuneration of adult educators and other personnel, provision of vehicles and research in adult literacy education, etc. The economic strength of adults participating in adult literacy is usually weak as result of family engagement thus, this poses threat to their involvement and continuation of the adult literacy programmes. To help promote the level of literacy, UNESCO had instructed that 26% of total annual budget of any nation be allocated to education Unachukwu, Ojiakor & Okafor (2003). By implication, funding adult literacy programmes by government and other non-governmental organisations is tended to help the adult reduce cost of enrolling in and continuing the literacy to the end.

Publicity: Publicity is an effective mean achieving the goals of adult literacy programmes. According to Chieke, et al (2017) publicizing adult literacy programmes can be done through multimedia or multidimensional approaches such as posters, use of jingles, fliers, radio talks, dramatization, films and use of town criers. Literacy programmes have over the years recorded successful outcomes due to effective publicity. It is a necessary strategy in improving adult literacy because most of the vital information's concerning literacy programmes are

made to our adult illiterates. Hence, publicity serves as a medium for disseminating information and correcting misinformation about literacy programmes in Nigeria. Consequently, the level of dissemination of information put into literacy programmes determines the level of success of such programmes.

Motivation: This strategy is directed to the adult learners and instructors. This strategy is adequately relevant because people respond to it internally and externally. Motivation helps them to give in their best. Motivation in adult literacy programmes can be done in different ways. Chieke, et al (2017) opined that the instructors can be motivated by adequate remuneration, giving opportunities for in service training, workshops and seminars so that they will have the chance to update their knowledge. In the areas of research, grants for research should be given to adult education professionals or practitioner to carry researches in adult education. On the other hand, the adult learners should be provided with free or highly subsidized educational materials, free or highly reduced schools fees so that the poor learners could pay. To further motivate them, Government and non-governmental agencies should give bursary and scholarships to adult learners for the economic losses they encounter for attending literacy classes two or three times a week.

In addition, other strategies that improve adult literacy in Nigeria include:

Support from Government and Non-Governmental Agencies: Government has put several modalities to achieve successful adult literacy. An example of such is the Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education formed in 1990. However, most of this modalities yield little or no result in Nigeria due to lack of political will

by the government in power and other functioning agencies. Most times, the support government gives to the programmes are usually at the planning and inaugural stages. By this, the programmes suffer lapses from their inception. More so, those involved tend to lose interests before the completion of the programme because of several difficulties encountered.

Formation of Adult Literacy College: A formidable strategy for improving adult literacy is the establishment of Adult Literacy College. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that it is only Adult Literacy/Education that is yet to have a post-primary institution that could help the adult literacy recipients to continue their education up to "junior secondary education level" (NPE, 2004), and even beyond. This is a monumental fit as adult learners who have acquired basic literacy skills would not stagnate at any stage of the educational process. Adult Literacy College would bridge the yawning gap that had existed for too long, and would provide many the opportunities they longed for, especially those who dropped out of school.

Nwafor & Agi (2013) argued that the establishment of an Adult Literacy College will provide avenues for socio-economic and political empowerment of its recipients. It is expected that the learners will acquire some essential inputs in their empowerment process. Accordingly Obanya, (2004) observed that the inputs include knowledge, skills, self-awareness, visible tools of power, positive self-concept, and full involvement/full control. Empowerment here therefore implies functional literacy in practice, which gives the individual beneficiaries a sense of self-worth, self-reliance and personal autonomy. In essence, the impact of the empowerment will, no doubt, be felt in the

growth of the Gross National Product (GNP), and in the increased per capita income of individual citizens.

Partnering with Government and Non-Governmental Agencies: This strategy implies that organizers of adult literacy programmes should partner with other stakeholders and agencies in order to finance and implement matters related to the programmes. Examples of such partnering agencies are the ministry of Health, Agriculture and finance, the religious leaders, the traditional rulers, private companies, etc (Chieke, Madu & Ewelum, 2017). These partnering agencies would help in providing monitoring and supervising teams that would improve the success of adult literacy programmes in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on discussions in this paper the following recommendations were made:

1. Adult educators should seek ways to adequately utilizing strategies of improving Adult literacy programmes in Nigeria.
2. Government should be involved in literacy programmes from inception to finish.
3. Government should involve more partnering agencies in promoting adult literacy programmes in the country.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, adult literacy tends to fill the void in the lives of adults who for one reason or the other lost the opportunity to be literate. It is evident that adult literacy programmes provide "a second chance", opportunity too many that does not have the opportunity of being literate in the real sense and many people who would have suffered many disabilities, especially the rural dwellers who wallow in abject poverty. Hence, strategies put in place to improve adult literacy programmes should be diversified to accommodate an all-inclusive and integrated learning experiences that would make functionality the central focus and objective of all activities of the institution.

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