

The Challenges Facing Adult and Continuing Education in Kenya

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Abstract

Education in any nation and to individuals within it is very important because education remains a valuable tool for fighting ignorance, disease, squalor and poverty. It is a means to raising enlightened citizenry who will help in bringing about a prosperous nation. Adult education is therefore not to be neglected as it had been in the past as its focus is to get adult (who had never been to school before or those who could not further their education because of one challenge or the other) to learn and through learning, change their attitudes and behaviors with the hope that this process of change will affect not only individuals positively but also the nation. This article will explore the importance of adult education and give an overview of the various challenges facing adult education and to seek solutions to such. Such challenges include long years of neglect by the government, perception of people about adult education, teaching methods and facilitators, funding and the problems facing adult learners themselves.

Keywords: Education, Continuing Education, Adult, Learning, School, self-reliance, change

Introduction

Throughout the world, there are over 125 million school age children who are not in school. Out of those, a significant number are from Africa. Although 2015 was the target specified by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) initiatives to achieve universal primary access, many of these countries are far from reaching this goal (Mukudi, 2004; UNDP, 2008; UNESCO, 2008a). Limited economic and organizational resources constrain their ability to build and expand their education systems yet the needs and demands for formal education in post-colonial Africa continue to grow.

Adult and Continuing Education Programmes (ACE) play a very crucial role in the development aspect of any society. They are widely recognized as a powerful tool for eradicating adult illiteracy, reducing poverty and attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

They provide basic Education and training opportunities to adults and out of school youth, aged fifteen years and above, who have either missed out on formal education in their childhood or for one reason or another, dropped out of school before attaining sustainable levels. (Mukudi, 2004; UNDP, 2008; UNESCO, 2008a).

The African Union (AU) has proposed a well-balanced comprehensive strategy which pays proper attention to issues of ACE programmes. Benin for instance launched a National Policy on Adult Education that contained the new vision, mission, objectives, strategies and resources needed to reach the defined goal (Ouane, 2009).

Burkina Faso too has a policy that includes a poverty reduction strategy paper revised in 2003. In its ten-year plan on education, one of the objectives is to promote literacy and Non-formal education (Ouane, 2009).

The resurgence of ACE programmes in the development programs of most African countries in the past 15 years has however been weak. Some do not still have clear policies on ACE Programs such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In Cameroon for instance, there is no clearly defined law on Adult Education but has related laws passed from 2004 to 2007 to cover literacy and professional training. In Nigeria, (Moja, 2000) singles out the problem of poor implementation of policy as having contributed to the failure of Education in assisting in the social and economic development of the country. (Moja, 2000)

Adult Education in Kenya

Kenya's national philosophy of education underscores the need to develop the human resource so as to attain the country's development goals (Republic of Kenya-ROK, 2012). Accordingly, education in Kenya should be geared towards developing one's potential fully. Among others, this will help produce individuals who are intellectually, physically and emotionally sound. In specific terms, such an education should make one to be patriotic, humane, and honest and have mutual respect as well as high moral status degree.

Indeed, the current national policies and Constitution take cognizance of the fact that all citizens have a right to basic education (ROK, 2005a; 2010; 2012). This is in line with international education commitments as well as conventions, including the Jomtien Protocols and the Millennium Development Goals to which Kenya is a signatory (ROK, 2007b).

It is important to note that ACE provides avenues for those who are not within the formal school set up to reap the fruits of education. Other than improving one's professional qualifications, ACE is aimed at achieving civic, social, moral and cultural attitudes as well as skills necessary in order to progress in every sphere of life. And, to achieve this, ACE programmes should be consciously designed to meet specific learning needs. Despite their significance in Kenya's National development, ACE programmes have continued to face regression, stagnation or even erosion in most areas since the mid-1980s. According to recent research findings, ACE programmes still lag much behind what is needed, in respect to employability and an active citizenship, not just in Kenya but in most countries. (Hinzen, 2007) for instance points out that Adult Education provision in most countries is neither sufficient in quantity nor in quality and that related statistics are also limited in scope and often outdated.

Historical background

The ACE Programmes in Kenya date back to the coming of Arab traders, European missionaries and explorers as well as the colonial officials in the late nineteenth Century who taught the adult converts industrial skills such as carpentry and masonry in addition to literacy, numeracy and agricultural skills, so as to have a skilled labor force (Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development, (2008).

The program reached its near climax in 1979 with the launch of the National mass literacy program, before beginning a downward trend that almost saw its collapse until the recent interventions.

Indeed, the milestones towards achieving adult literacy were recognized soon after independence in 1963 when the aims of adult education were identified, including to: curb illiteracy, impart relevant knowledge, skills and attitude for survival, foster self-esteem and inculcate desirable behavior in as far as life and society are concerned. With these objectives in mind, the initial subject matter in the adult education programme included literacy, health and nutrition, family life, agriculture, environmental studies and civics (Ndiku et al, 2009; Kibera, 1997).

This content is still relevant today. It was hoped that this curriculum, if well implemented would lead to transformation of the lives of the many otherwise illiterate adults. In 1979, the Department of Adult Education was established in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services to, among others, spearhead a national literacy programme (UNESCO, 2007). This bold step saw the establishment of adult education centers in most parts of the country.

In 2002, the coordination of adult education was moved to the Ministry of Education. A key outcome of housing adult education in the Ministry of Education was a gradual increase in enrolment in adult learners. For example, there were about 250,000 such learners in 2007 and 291,000 of them in 2012. (Hinzen, 2007).

Challenges facing the implementation of Adult Education in Kenya

The implementation of Adult and Continuing Education in Kenya faces a myriad of challenges, ranging from poor leadership and funding as well as attitude to low learning achievement levels among the affected learners.

It is worth noting that while the Constitution emphasizes on devolution in as far as management of education is concerned, policy making largely remains the responsibility of the national government (Sotz, 2011). Such a scenario could partially explain the challenges the delivery of ACE in the country is grappling with.

Unreliable data is another challenge in as far as governance and management of ACE is concerned. Particularly, without legal provisions in place to guard against misinformation or non-cooperation with respect to relevant data, those in charge of departments as well as institutions release data that is not reliable to fit their unique circumstances or hide their shortcomings (ROK, 2007a).

The Kenya National Adult Literacy Survey report (ROK, 2007a) established that 61.5 % of the adult population, that is, those aged 15 years and above had only achieved the minimum level of literacy, meaning that 38.5 % or a whopping 7.8 million others were illiterate. The survey also found out that a paltry 29.6 % of the adult population had acquired the appropriate literacy competencies. It is important to observe that in order to achieve the Kenya Vision 2030, a change of attitude is required to create and sustain a responsible as well as intact society.

Although one of the goals of ACE is to improve Kenya's measurable learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy and communication skills (ROK, 2012), access to ACE programmes is low and both gender and regional disparities are glaring (Ndiku, et al, 2009). For example, while there were 147,940 (37,093 males and 110,487 females) learners in adult education centres in 1990, the number dropped to 93,903 (25,802 males and 68,101 females) in 2000.

The number however, increased slightly in 2005 to 107,662 (29,205 males and 78,457 females). This translates to 21.1% and 72.9% for males and females, respectively. As per ROK (2007a), there are high regional disparities in literacy achievement, with the defunct Nairobi and North Eastern provinces recording a high of 87.1 % and a low of 8 %, respectively.

According to Ndiku, et al (2009), poor enrolment in literacy classes involving adult learners in Kenya is due to the failure to hire sufficient and qualified teachers. This scenario is compounded by the fact that there is higher turnover of staff and volunteer teachers in ACE facilities.

Social factors discourage some adults from attending classes. Accordingly, adult learners either come late or miss school altogether due to participation in such social functions as circumcision, marriage and funerals.

Related reasons that prevented learners from attending classes involve cases where the young and older learners as well as husbands and wives are mixed, while Muslims do not like to be taught by female instructors.

Some learners drop out because of language barrier due to ethnicity or dialects and being taught by what they considered to be very young teachers. This requires communities to be sensitized so as to discard those cultural beliefs and practices which are retrogressive. Other learners remain absent or came to class late due to engagement in such economic activities as trade, planting and harvesting crops.

Inadequate capitation grants for instructional materials are another major challenge facing ACE (ROK, 2007a). Thus, there is need for the government to direct adequate funds to purchase appropriate as well as adequate instructional resources. Additionally, training programmes need to be expanded to enable the concerned teachers to manage adult learning centres both professionally and effectively.

Below is an Adult Education budgetary for some countries in Africa.

Budgetary Allocations on Adult Education in some other countries:**Country Percentage %**

Ghana 31
Cote d' Ivoire 20
Kenya 23
Morocco 17.7
Botswana 19.0
Swaziland 24.6
Lesotho 17.0
Uganda 27.0
Burkina Faso 16.8

Source: Education Rights Campaign (2013)

Ndiku, *et al* (2009), found out that adult learners dropped out due to the instructor's incompetence. Particularly, some adult education teachers were found to be quite fast in delivery of content. This way, they did not take into consideration individual differences among the learners. Other instructors were reported to be attending school irregularly.

And, according to ROK (2012), adult education teachers are inadequately remunerated and are largely volunteers. They are usually either retired teachers or secondary school leavers without any form of professional training. Indeed, meeting the goals of ACE requires both structural and curriculum reform to boost literacy levels and align it to the ideals of the Constitution and the Kenya Vision 2030. Clearly, transformative leaders are required, more than ever before, to remedy this scenario.

Overall, the above as well as other challenges have led to low enthusiasm in as far as enrolment in adult education classes is concerned (Ndiku, et al; Seetharamu & Devi, 2010). Among others, it is imperative to establish conducive adult learning centres which are equipped with appropriate pieces of furniture. To achieve this, communities, non-governmental organizations, sponsors, development partners and relevant stakeholders need to supplement on this course. Given that learners' participation in ACE classes is basically voluntary, they can be motivated if their educators address their aspirations (Seetharamu & Devi, 2010). This can go a long way in improving adult learner recruitment as well as achievement. According to Nafukho, Amutabi and Otunga (2005), efforts should be made to motivate adult learners and emphasize on the significance of lifelong learning. More importantly, providing focused leadership as well as management remains a crucial remedy to these challenges.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, this paper concludes that Adult and Continuing Education is a key component of educational practice of any community. However it faces many challenges that have hampered its progress and once the challenges are addressed, adults will yield the goals of Education For All.

It is also true to state that, the 21st century has better prospects for adult education to move forward with globalization trends. This is because the key to the development of any nation lies in the quality of adults that any nation has. It is the adults who will transform the nation, not the children. Therefore adult education must be a pacesetter to other professions in developmental drive of any nation. There should be a radical overhaul of adult education programmes which is committed with global trends.

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