

Adult Education and National Development Challenges and the 'Change Begins With Me' Maxim in Nigeria

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Abstract

Education, particularly adult education, as a tool for development is globally acknowledged. In Nigeria, education as a tool for national development is reflected in the national policy of education. This policy also sets five objectives of adult education which it considers as the necessary kinds of change required in individual adults that will also translate into national development. This paper therefore examined the link between adult education and national development with emphasis on Nigeria. The paper observes however that adult education have failed to achieve its objectives due to some major problems it faces. They revolve around five key stakeholders, namely: the adult learners; the adult populace; the adult instructors; policy makers/adult education planners, and; the government at three levels (local, state and federal). These problems are identified and discussed vis-a-vis the "Change begins with me" maxim of the President Muhammadu Buhari administration launched recently. The paper proffers solution to each of the problems identified by arguing that unless the key stakeholders aforementioned change in line with the "Change begins with me" maxim, the problems adult education is facing in Nigeria can hardly, if ever, be addressed adequately. Adult education as a tool for national development would therefore remain only in our imaginations.

Key Words: adult; change; development; education; national

Introduction

The five objectives of adult education in Nigeria as set by the National Policy On Education clearly implies that adult education in Nigeria is right now geared towards national development. The impetus of change in adult education in Nigeria is deep-rooted in the Nigerian national Development Plans since the 1970s. The objective of the processes of adult education and national development is to get the adults, either as individuals or as a group, to learn and through learning to change their attitude and behaviour for the socio-economic and political development of the nation. This underscores the importance of Adult Education in the achievement of President Muhammadu Buhari Administration new slogan ("Change begins with me") recently launched.

Some of the major problems of present day Nigeria are poverty, hunger, indiscipline, unemployment and under-development. To mitigate or solve these problems adult education is important because it is the adult personnel of this country who are already at the production sectors and who will eventually transform this country from what it is today to achieve its developmental targets. It is in this light that Nyerere of Tanzania, who rightly believed that adults must develop first before the nation can develop, declared that:

We cannot afford to wait for the children. First, we must educate the adults. Our children will not have an impact on our economic development for five, ten or even twenty years.adults have an impact now! (Quoted in Ewuzie, 2013)

Thus, for adult education to effectively and efficiently bring about sustainable development to our nation, key stakeholders must change in line with the "Change begins with me" maxim. These key stakeholders include the individual adult learners, the populace, the adult instructors, the policy makers and adult education planners and the government at all three levels - Local, State and Federal. This paper therefore seeks to accomplish two tasks.

First, it will discuss the link between adult education and national development in Nigeria. Secondly, the paper will identify the problems/challenges inherent in adult education programme in Nigeria and the need for the aforementioned key stakeholders to, in the spirit of change begins with me, change themselves and take the necessary steps of making adult education efficient and effective in achieving and sustaining national development, which Nigeria badly needs. Meanwhile, the concept adult education should be in order.

Definition of Adult Education

Adult education has varied definitions from different authorities and writers. However, one definition that we find more comprehensive in the sense that it does not only define adult education but it also defines its contents and scope, is UNESCO's definition given way back in 1976 at its international conference in Nairobi, viz.:

The entire body of organized educational process, whatever the content, level and method, formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges 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 and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development (UNESCO, 1976).

In other words, adult education is the formal, informal and non-formal form of education based on the needs of the adult and given to an adult by the society in order to improve and empower him/her to economically, politically, socially, and culturally contribute significantly to his/her society as its useful and acceptable member. In short, adult education is the education geared towards the adult. This gives rise to the question “who is an adult”.

Adult as a concept, just like adult education, has been defined differently by many different authors. Bown (1979) and Ibeh (2008) see an adult as one who has attained full physical development and is expected to participate as a responsible member of the family, work place and the society. Nzeneri (2010) conceives of an adult as a person who is matured both physically and psychologically as well as responsible economically, politically, socially, culturally and environmentally. An adult is also defined as one who has attained the voting age, which is 18 years in Nigeria and in many, if not most, countries. Looking at these three definitions the emphasis is on maturity and responsibility. There is however a recommendation by UNESCO (1976) that an adult should be a person regarded as such by the society to which he/she belongs. Going by this recommendation, an adult for this paper is anybody who is 18 years old and above as provided by the Nigerian constitution.

Adult Education and National Development

The link between education and National Development cannot be overemphasised because education is the most important instrument of change and development. This is evident in the fact that while highly developed countries like Europe and America have high levels and rates of literate and educated citizens, the underdeveloped countries like Nigeria, have high levels and rates of illiterate and uneducated. As rightly observed by Eke (1992: 2):

A cursory look at the political climate of the world shows clearly that regions of mass illiteracy are generally regions of instability, economic and political underdevelopment. Economically, an illiterate is on the periphery, politically he is completely in the dark.

Education as tool for change and development is well recognised by the Nigerian Nation as clearly indicated in its National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004). The five main national development goals of Nigeria, which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on education (NPE), are the building of:

1. a free and, democratic society;
2. a just egalitarian society;
3. a united, strong and self-reliant nations;
4. a great and dynamic economy;
5. a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

The NPE further reiterated the belief in Nigeria’s philosophy of Education that:

1. education is an instrument for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education;

2. education fosters the worthy development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for general development of the society
3. the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around, and;
4. the acquisition of appropriate skills and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

Accordingly, the NPE declared that:

1. education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change; any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by education;
2. life-long education shall be the basis of the nation's educational policy;
3. education and training facilities shall continue to be expanded in response to social needs and made progressively accessible to afford the individual a far more diversified and flexible choice;
4. educational activities shall be centred on the learner for maximum self-development and self-fulfilment;
5. Universal Basic education in a variety of forms; depending on needs and possibilities, shall be provided for all citizens;
6. Efforts shall be made to relate education to overall community needs;
7. Educational assessment and evaluation shall be liberalized by their being based in part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual;
8. Modern education techniques shall be increasingly used and improved upon at all levels of the education system;
9. The education system shall be structured to develop the practice of self-learning. Government shall in this regard continue to encourage the establishment of Young Readers Clubs in schools;
10. At any stage of the education process after junior secondary education, an individual shall be able to choose between continuing full-time studies, combining work with study, or embarking on full-time employment work with study, or embarking on full-time employment without excluding prospect of resuming studies later on;
11. Opportunity shall continue to be made for made for religious instruction; no child will be forced to accept any religious instruction which is contrary to the wishes of his or her parents; and
12. Physical and health education shall be emphasized at all levels of the education system.

On Adult Education, the NPE provides five objectives that should be pursued in order to have educated adult population that can contribute to national development. These are:

1. To provide functional literacy education for adults who have never had the opportunity of any formal education;
2. To provide functional and remedial education for those young people who prematurely dropped out of the formal school system;
3. To provide further education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills;
4. To provide in-service and on-the-job vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills;
5. To give the adult citizens of the country aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

As rightly observed by Monye (1981), cited in Ewuzie (2013), the five adult education objectives above are together aimed at equipping the adult with all the things he/she needs for life in order to be essential to his/her society by helping to solve some of its problems. Surely, development is of human, by human and for human. A human being is the master of his/her destiny and adult education objectives as stated above is geared towards bringing about a fundamental change in human's attitudes and life style. For human race to continue to exist effectively, they must have adequate awareness of, and right attitudes to their environment (physical and social), and literacy/education is the key to such awareness.

Linking this to the abovementioned national development objectives, one cannot but agree with Eke (1972) that "the nation cannot be strong when the vast majority of its citizens live in ignorance". For development plans to be actuated, a committed participation of the people is very necessary. And people cannot even participate much less with commitment, if they are not made aware of the importance of development to them as individuals and to the nation.

Uneducated and uninformed citizenry cannot understand the significance of various reforms in the areas of the economy, education, health, law, security, politics/governance, culture, etcetera, meant for the development of the nation. In short, the significance of such reforms and other nation-building efforts and, certainly, self satisfaction and self-reliance, cannot be grasped by the illiterate and the uneducated. In other words, for Nigeria to achieve significant and relevant changes in its economic, social, cultural and political spheres, its adult population must be educated. In this regard we agree with the statement of Nyerere of Tanzania quoted earlier in this paper, which reasoned that for our nation to develop we must first educate our adults because they have an impact now while that of the children is in the future.

The Nyerere's concept of educating the adult first does not however mean we neglect the education of the children. The appropriate message is that education of both children and adults must be pursued with the seriousness each deserves because both the present and the future are very important in achieving and sustaining national development respectively. The second important message derivable from our discussions of the link between development and adult education, is that national development starts with the individual. This fits very well with the "Change begins with me" maxim of the current administration. This, leads us to the next important section of our paper, which seeks to identify and discuss the implications of the link between adult education and national development for the "Change begins with me" maxim.

Adult Education Problems and the "Change Begins With Me" MAXIM

The inextricable relevance of adult education to national development as discussed in the preceding section is beyond doubt. Unfortunately however the problems of adult education in Nigeria are so numerous that it is doubtful if it is playing its desired role. In this section, we examine how the "Change begins with me" maxim can play out with key stakeholders to transform adult education in Nigeria and make it have the desired impact in changing the individual for national development. The key stakeholders of concern here are the Adult education learners, the populace, adult instructors, policy makers and adult education planners/ managers, and the three tiers of government - local, state and federal.

Adult Education Learners, The Populace And Adult Instructors

Concerning the adult learners, a number of attitudinal problems needs to be addressed by the adult learners themselves in consonant with the change begins with me maxim. The adult learners usually have the feeling that they are too old to benefit from the fruits of education. The questions usually raised concern the length of time they need to spend to graduate and where to gain employment to harvest what they expended on their education (Doubleglist.Com, 2013). Consequently, many adults are reluctant to join adult education programme. Those who happened to join, dropped out of the programme for the same reason. In consonant with the change begins with me, the adult learners should put efforts to change these negative attitudes as explained in the next paragraph.

First, adult learners should understand that their advanced age and the duration of the programme should not bother them because it is never too late to learn, and education, as rightly argued by Orji (1986), is the continuous development of the physical, mental, social, spiritual and other capacities of man and woman (cited in Doubleglist.Com, 2013: 11). In other words, education is a lifelong process; "it is what happens to human beings from the day they are born to the day they die" (Castle, 1974, cited in Doubleglist.Com, 2013: 11). Secondly, regarding getting job to harvest what they have invested into their education, they should know that Adult education is not for the sole aim of offering new jobs to adult learners; rather it is for the improvement of their knowledge and skills in whatever vocation they find themselves.

There is also the feelings among the older adults that it is an abomination for them to sit before the adult instructors usually much younger than themselves to learn or train (Doubleglist.Com, 2013). This attitude must change too. They should know that there are many sources of knowledge and what matters much is the contents of the knowledge. Thus, if the contents is valid, reliable and utilisable, the source could be your grandchild, it matters not. After all, as children learn from adults, the adults also learn certain things from the children as they grow up.

The negative attitudes of male adults of the community are another problem for the female adult learners which strangulate adult education in Nigeria. Many males, especially husbands, feel that educated/literate women do not make good housewives because they may claim equality with, or even superiority over their less educated or illiterate husbands (Doubleglist.Com, 2013; Sa'ad, 2014).

In particular, the Sa'ad's study (2014: 10) in Borno State showed how two types of husbands' biases practically constituted barriers to women participation in adult literacy classes. Substantial number of husbands believe that adult education will make wives arrogant (80.3%) and that it is a waste of time (88.7%) for wives to participate in adult education.

In the spirit of change begins with me, the adult members of the community, both men and women, need to change these negative attitudes themselves. They should realize that one of the objectives of the National Policy on Education is "To give the adult citizens of the country aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment" (NPE, 2004). This objective is geared toward equipping the adult learner with the necessary knowledge and skills that will make him/her appreciate the beauty and goodness in his community and make him/her a cultured and civic member of the community. A cultured person, is an individual who has received good training which has made his/her behaviour acceptable to the community in which he/she lives. And to say that a person is civic is to say that he/she conforms to the rules and regulations of society. On the contrary therefore, adult education can make women good wives and conforming members of their communities and the larger society.

Financial and/or economic burdens on the adult learners makes financing their participation in adult education difficult; hence many of them do not participate or withdraw along the way (Doubleglist.Com, 2013; Sa'ad, 2014). The study by Sa'ad on this issue has found that adult women could not participate or dropped out of adult education because they could not afford money for two things - for daily transport to and from adult education learning centres, and for purchase of materials for such activities as knitting, sewing, tie and dye, catering, etcetera (Sa'ad, 2014: 12) . They also could not find enough time to attend, because of their preoccupation with income earning activities to supplement family income (Sa'ad, 2014: 12).

From the above, it is very clear that adult learners have other personal, family and community financial demands and levies which eat a lot into their meager financial resources; leaving virtually nothing to support their continuous participation in adult education. In the spirit of change begins with me however, the adult learners need to change their situation by reprioritizing their financial commitments to place adult education on upper most part of the ladder in view of the unquantifiable benefits of adult education to themselves and to the society. They should understand that adult education can, in fact, improve efficiency and effectiveness in whatever vocation they are already engaged, thereby enhancing their earnings to meet their other demands.

Poor public perception of adult education is another serious problem of adult education in Nigeria. Adult education field is wrongly perceived as an area of study for the old people; hence its low patronage as a discipline in Nigerians Universities (Aruma 2011). The consequent of this is shortages of qualified instructors and professionals in the field to support a robust adult education system in the country. The public must therefore change their wrong perception. They must understand that adult education is a significant area of study that presents numerous opportunities to individuals. The universities and other higher education institutions that offer adult education must also take responsibility and publicise on sustained basis the importance of adult education as a field of study, and the prospects it offers those who study it.

Lack of commitment to adult education by adult instructors is another Adult Education problem that needs to be addressed. Presently, the adult instructor in adult literacy centres in Nigeria feels bad and disappointed with his/her profession attributable to his meagre pay and poor working condition - working in "dilapidated and unstimulating environment without the necessary teaching/learning facilities" (Onyenemezu, 2012: 2). Onyenemezu further observed that the "adult educator suffers stress, insults and violence from this (sic) clientele and government in handling adult education programme" (Onyenemezu, 2012: 2), which demoralises him/her even further. In the spirit of change begins with me, the adult instructor must rededicate himself/herself in spite of the odds, while he/she makes case for the resolutions of his meagre pay and poor and demeaning working conditions to his/her employers (the government) and the society in general.

Policy Makers, Adult Education Planners, and the Government

Another problem of adult education programme in Nigeria is that it is lagging behind the 21st century requirements - a century that is characterized by explosions of knowledge and hi-technology which has helped brought about developments in different sectors of human endeavour.

In the spirit of change begins with me, the policy makers and education planners must also change to become more alert to global changes in the 21st century so as to regularly integrate into adult education those innovations such as the information and communication technology (ICT), which have made the 21st century distinctive. As rightly observed by Onyenemezu (2012: 5) one of the "fundamental requirements which adult education programme planners need to incorporate into its schedule is the knowledge and practice of information and communication technology". Presently, the ICT drive almost all sectors of human endeavour, and so adult education cannot afford to lag behind if it was to remain relevant and alive to its role as a developmental tool.

Adult education is not just for development. It is also for liberation and peace (Frere, 2006). Unfortunately, adult education in Nigeria does not seem to perform these roles adequately whereas one unfortunate problem of the 21st century in Nigeria is the erosion of the culture of peace and harmony. Since independence, the geographical area known as Nigeria has been experiencing various political, economic and ethno-religious conflicts. Not long after independence, the political and ethno-religious conflicts culminated into a civil war. After the civil war we still have not learnt our lesson; the political, economic and ethno-religious conflicts continued. Presently, the Niger-delta crisis is still much with us. So also are the clashes between farmers and cattle herders. Not to talk of Boko Haram. Thus, in the spirit of change begins with me, adult instructors and planners should, as rightly suggested by Onyenemezu (2012: 5), integrate in its 21st century programme an adult education that has the capacity to educate the adult members of the different Nigerian communities a culture of peace and harmony.

One major and final adult education problem in Nigeria which required urgent change in this our era of change is the neglect adult education suffers in the hands of all the three tiers of government - Local, State and Federal. The government neglect is reflected in the dearth of qualified instructors, low pay for adult instructors, poor working and learning environment due to poor infrastructure, inadequate and/or absence of teaching/learning materials, etcetera. The last three factors for example have been found in Sa'ad's study, to have combined to make adult education programme unattractive to both participants and non participants of the programmes in Borno State. "Thus", she concluded,:

...the image the programme (*adult education*) had built for itself over the years is one of education at the last resort. Hence most of the learners seem to be learning out of necessity. Not really being enthusiastic about the programme and its ability to impact new ideas to them, ideas that may improve their lives via improved skills and improved job opportunities and income.(Sa'ad, 2014: 168 & 169. *Insertion not in original*).

Undoubtedly, all these problems related to neglect are due to inadequate funding from the government at all levels. Thus, in line with the change begins with me maxim, all the three tiers of government should allocate adequate funds to adult education programme especially literacy and continuing education programmes because, as rightly stated by Onyenemezu (1912: 5), "we cannot make progress in the 21st century where we have a nation where children and their adult parents are illiterate". Similarly, we cannot bring change within the individual (which is the message of change begins with me) without having nearly everybody literate, particularly the adult population including hard-to-reach populace such as the nomads, hills top dwellers (e.g., the Koma and Gwoza people), migrant fishermen, etc.

Conclusion

It is clear in this paper that adult education is a veritable tool for change and development. Unfortunately it has myriad of problems in Nigeria which revolve around its key stakeholders. And so, for it to play its veritable role of changing the people and the nation for better, its key stakeholders need to change in the spirit of the change begins with me maxim, and do the right things. Those right things they should do have been identified and clearly discussed.

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