

**ADULT EDUCATION AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION: A PANACEA
FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND JOB CREATION IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The relegation of women to the background through cultural norms and practices has had negative impacts on their lives. As a result, they have been denied the right to be creative and take to decisions which will help transform their lives as citizens capable of acquiring development activities through adult and non-formal education programmes. The traditional belief that places women at the home front made most women miss the formal education that would have enabled them to engage in gainful employment. Be that as it may, the concern of this paper is to examine the avenues through which women can be effectively empowered through adult and non-formal education programmes so as to give meaning and happiness to the women throughout their lives. It also seeks to examine how the acquired knowledge and skills can be applied to real life situations and job requirement so that the woman can survive and thrive in an ever-changing world.

The acquisition of skills and knowledge is essential for the development of the autonomous and productive individual women. Adult and Non-Formal education offers a second chance to women who could not benefit from the formal school system, the opportunity to get useful knowledge and skills to improve their lots in the society. Imhabekhai (2009) asserted that Adult and Non-Formal education programmes can be directed towards providing the participants who are unemployed with employable skills and the provision of on-the-job or

off-the-job training for workers. It can also be directed towards providing social, cultural, political, and functional education in all aspects of life to participants.

In essence, Adult and Non-Formal education is out-of-school education designed to meet the needs and aspirations of women. Non-formal education is seen as one of the strategies that can contribute to improving the quality of life by offering knowledge and skills to all people especially women outside the "school system".

Adult and non-formal education as developed for the needs of women focuses attention on promoting changes in relationship between women and their society. Both women and non-formal education have low status within the society and women especially those in the working class whom are seriously under-represented in decision making, in planning and implementation of programmes.

According to Okunkpo (2005), seventy (70) percent of the target groups of literacy programmes are girls and women. In other words, 70 percent of the 100 million illiterate people in the world today are women and girls. She went further to say that their voices which are real life problems become an embarrassment and a nuisance to the society. To this end, various scholars have identified several factors that are responsible for the low participation of women in education and these include cultural/religious factors, economic conditions of the family, labour market opportunities, opportunity costs of formal education, relevance of school

curriculum and time constraints. Women face a double jeopardy; as part of the urban and rural society, they are severely limited in their opportunities because of the political and economic powerlessness. As women, they suffer again because of their roles, cultures that sanction subordination to men and a range of barriers to independent thought and action.

Cultural moves often supported by women as well as men not only hold that women cannot act effectively in non-traditional roles but also that it is inappropriate for them to try. The result of all these on women can be seen in the menial jobs they do. There is also discrimination against women in matters of education and training. Management is seen as a male function while supportive work is for female, skilled manual work for men while semi-skilled for women in most society.

This may be why Oyiso (2005) is of the opinion that women continued to be in the least skilled and lowest paid jobs. The origin of these attitudes lay, of course not only on the school system but also the home, psychology and pedagogy, curriculum orientation of education both in the childhood and adolescent stages.

With women's Non-Formal education, changes have been observed to this attitude. Oytiso further reasserted that three quarters of part-time workers in most industrialized societies are women. Moreover, women throughout the third world are strong and active contributors to the socio-economic development of their societies. They are engaged in considerable

work outside the home, though this is gradually being recognized.

Jones and Veronica (2004) observed that a more recent orientation in non-formal education programmes over the last decade has focused on increasing women's awareness and understanding of the factors responsible for their oppression and position of disadvantage. It is in furtherance and pursuance of these facts that non-formal education is considered as a potent instrument for empowering women by creating job for them.

Essentially, women empowerment involves a conscious effort aimed at raising the consciousness of women about the deplorable situation under which they operate and to enable them take actions towards the resolution of the problem. Women through non-formal education can be empowered economically and socially. Economic empowerment involves engaging in income-generating activities to subsidize their family income. Socially and psychologically, women can be made aware that they can improve on their conditions by developing self-confidence and self-esteem which will enable them to interact within their environment. It is on this note that Adult and Non-Formal education is identified as a vehicle through which women can reach the empowerment stage in Nigeria.

Conceptualization of Adult and Non-Formal Education

The definitions of adult education provided by various organizations, scholars, and practitioners or professionals vary from person to person, from time to

time. These definitions have been influenced by the specific orientation or field of their authors, the nature of the programme involved, the target audience as well as their social, economic, political, and ideological inclination and philosophy; (Anyanwu in Imhabekhai, 2009).

The UNESCO definition of Adult education enunciated at the Nairobi conference states that adult education denotes the:

Entire body of organized educational processes whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges, and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society in 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 perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic, and cultural development (UNESCO in Brown and Okedara (2005).

Adult education needs to be seen essentially as an instrument for creating awareness and consciousness for all Adults in the society to enable them have more critical views of social, economic, and political conditions in their environment. It is also to enable them develop a sense of belonging, a feeling of participation and satisfaction and a full opportunities for development to the limit which each adult in the society can undergo. Thus, adult

education is a process of removing obstacles and impediments that reduce the full realization of each adult's potential.

Non-formal Education: An Overview

Non-formal education is any form of organized education activity for youths, children, and adults who cannot be integrated into the formal school system as a result of some socially, economically, and politically imposed conditions. According to the United Nations Organization, in Nzeneri (2008), non-formal education is:

An integral part of the entire system of education, lying institutionally and significantly outside the formal system of education, and very much a supplement as well as a complement to it. It is the product of change and development in society and it covers a wide range of activities, depending on the prevailing social, economic, and political circumstances.

Non-formal education programmes can be directed towards providing the participants who are unemployed with employable skills and the provision of on-the-job or off-the-job training for workers. It can also be directed towards providing social, cultural, political, and functional education in all aspects of life to participants. The programmes are usually tailored towards meeting the specific needs of the clientele.

The General Aims of Adult and Non Formal Education as Stated in the National Policy on Education NPE (2004) are:

- To provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education. These include the nomads, migrant families, the disabled and other categories or groups, especially the disadvantaged gender.
- To provide functional and remedial education for those young people who did not complete secondary education.
- To provide education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills.
- To provide in-service, on-the-job, vocational and professional education in order to improve their skills.
- To give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

To attain these goals, the Federal Government established a National Commission for Mass literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education. To complement the efforts of the federal government, each state established a Mass Literacy Agency as part of the overall national effort to eradicate mass illiteracy in Nigeria. The commission shall monitor and evaluate the

mass literacy programmes and facilitate communication between the commission and the state agencies.

Women's Empowerment: A Necessity through Adult Education Programmes

Empowering women means creating in them the cognitive awareness of their conditions of subordination and the factors creating such conditions. It also involves creating knowledge in them about their sexuality through mental transformation process. The transformation involves a modification of the modern day role of women.

Adele and Ellis (2003) affirmed that adult education programmes have become tools for empowering women as long as they promote skills in critical thinking, and help develop self confidence and skills to plan and organize for change.

Promoting women's empowerment through adult and non-formal education programmes is a great idea as well as a necessity. This is because women's empowerment is an essential avenue through which women can be adequately informed about the events around them and become capable of taking control of their world.

Moreover, the methods used to facilitate learning and empowerment activities would help to increase the women's self confidence, self-concept, and self respect. It also remains an important factor in the involvement of all women for better living conditions.

Women's empowerment must be seen as a powerful tool against ignorance, poverty, and disease. Okunkpo (2005) emphasized that methods used to facilitate learning and empowerment place economic growth at the service of the women for improved living conditions and full realization of their capabilities. This, he reiterated can be achieved most effectively by unifying the educational system and projecting women's national needs aimed at satisfying yearnings for educational achievement and encouraging innovativeness. The concept of empowerment could offer positive, realistic, and sustainable development for women in the years ahead. The motive for empowerment is that the women should not only be made more efficient and effective in the short run, but should be prepared to face any challenges likely to develop in future as a result of empowerment programmes.

Adult and Non-Formal Education Programmes

As previously stated, adult, and non-formal education programmes are intricately interwoven. This is because the programmes which many agencies or individuals often refer to as adult education sometimes involve a mixture of adults and children participants. For instance, in some states in Nigeria, we find children or young persons in literacy classes side by side with adult learners and yet, such classes are labelled Adult Literacy Classes or Centres. There are also a number of other programmes which are solely meant for adults and as a result are Adult education

programmes per se. These include Women Education, Labour Education, Worker Education, Retirement and Pre-retirement Education, Civic Education. These programmes are not referred to as adult education programmes either because the agencies providing them have not recognized that they are involved in adult education or because of the poor perception of the society of Adult education. The perception which was engendered by the age-long notion of adult education as being synonymous with literacy education for adults who can not read, write, and compute.

Conclusion

The maximal utilization of adult education programmes has helped immensely in meeting the yearnings, needs, hopes, and aspirations of the women in Nigeria. This is why Olori (2008) stated that adult education programmes remain the most important tool with which national development plan can help women to develop themselves. In addition, Odueran and Oyitso (2004) revealed that adult education programmes frequently stress the promotion of values of equalitarianism and egalitarianism both of which are battle cries of the disadvantaged women in Nigeria. Be that as it may, Adult education programmes and women's empowerment should give more meaning to the drive towards life-long education for women. The acquisition of skills will produce more functional educated women who will be conscious of their civic rights and responsibilities in the society. Okunkpo (2005) stressed that literacy

classes for women should become nuclei for consciousness rising. It should help women to form strong groups so that they can gain more and more control over their lives, help themselves break the silence, and make themselves visible.

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