

THE CONNECTIVITY OF ADULT EDUCATION AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This study examines the possibility of adult education as a panacea for the eradication of poverty in Nigeria. It defines poverty as a state of shortage or deficiency of meeting basic needs. It argues that education is an important means for poverty reduction. To substantiate its arguments, the article draws from relevant theoretical and empirical literatures. From the literature a link between education and poverty reduction is established. The major causes of poverty are overpopulation, illiteracy, unemployment, environmental degradation and government insensitivity to the welfare of the people. Some poverty eradication strategies highlighted include: (i) organisation of international workshops on eradication of poverty, (ii) respect for human rights, (iii) quality basic education for girls (iv) meaningful contributions by NGOs, (v) provision of jobs for the people, all of which are products of adult education. Some recommendations are made towards the deployment of adult education programmes for the reduction of poverty in Nigeria. The paper concludes by emphasizing the significance of and the need for proper management of education in order to make it an effective tool for poverty reduction in Nigeria.

Key words: Education, Adult Education, Poverty reduction, Strategies.

Introduction

Poverty is now a global issue for the international community through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which include among others 'eradication of extreme poverty and hunger'. In developing countries, poverty is usually studied in monetary terms by comparing the level of income or consumption with a given threshold (people living with less than one dollar a day) According to Sen (1999).

We live in a world of unprecedented affluence, of a kind that would have been hard even to imagine a century or two ago. ... And yet we also live in a world with remarkable deprivation, destitution and oppression. There are many new problems as well as old ones, including persistence of poverty and unfulfilled elementary needs....Overcoming these problems is a central part of the exercise of development (62).

One of the most disturbing features of the world, particularly the third world to which Nigeria belongs, is poverty. It remains one of the most familiar enemies of most third world countries. Poverty is a disease or unpalatable condition that has eaten so deep into the structure of the Nigerian populace. It is one of the very many problems of serious degree

confronting the contemporary Nigerian society.

However, both military and civilian governments who have ruled the country (Nigeria) have desired to provide a panacea to the problems of poverty since independence in 1960 without success. Also various programmes like MAMSER, NAPEP, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Live Above Poverty Organisation (LAPO), have been established for the education of the people and to find a lasting solution to poverty and its debilitating effects. But much of these programmes did not succeed as they were basically marred by corruption (Orji, 2005).

Moreover, it is an established fact that Nigeria is among the most endowed country with human, material and mineral resources in the world but yet was rated one of the poorest countries world-wide. Nigeria is still surviving as a nation but it is yet to flourish. Oriahi and Aitufe, (2010) cited in Akintayo (2013) is of the view that ironically, Nigeria, a country so blessed with rich human and natural resources and yet her people are very poor need a drastic step to get out of the avoidable wretchedness. The main asset of the poor is human capital. Human capital development, particularly education and training is a critical factor for a country's sustainable socio-economic development and poverty eradication (URT, 2007). A successful poverty eradication strategy would require full and proper development of human capital through equitable education policies (World Bank, 2000). This is, especially, in line with the fact that

poverty is a complex issue that requires to be tackled by using all fronts including education. Education is thus a vital tool because its role in poverty reduction cannot be underestimated as no country has successfully eradicated poverty without one form of education or the other geared towards the citizenry. As one of the most powerful instruments for poverty reduction, education can be a guarantee for development in every society and to every family. Its centrality is not only for poverty reduction but it can also contribute in reducing inequality (World Bank, 2004). It can equally be argued that education enhances people's productivity. No one would doubt that education gives people some necessary skills that would increase their capacity to produce more effectively and efficiently. Education can, thus, directly reduce poverty through the contribution that productivity enhancement leads to economic growth, and that could indirectly help to alleviate poverty through its positive spill-over effects (externalities) on society more broadly.

One can establish a linkage between adult education and poverty by considering the fact that investment in education is a poverty reduction strategy (Akintayo, 2013), which can enhance the skills and productivity among poor households and secondly, poverty is by itself a constraint to educational achievement both at the macro-level and micro-level. This is because the poor endure much serious deprivation of poverty as compared to the rich people, and this affects the level of educational attainment (Oladapo, 2010,

2013). In addition, low level of education affects individual productivity. Low production is considered a serious handicap to poverty reduction efforts since low productivity is considered to be a product of and in turn an indicator of poverty and unemployment, and it is positively associated with low income (Rogers, 1967). In most African countries (Nigeria inclusive), poverty is determined by ignorance, illiteracy, poor health access and other factors. The poorest section of the population are rural of which the vast majority are women, most of the poor are illiterates, therefore, literacy and adult education are key factor for a crucial contribution to poverty reduction.

Theoretical Framework

Human capital theory has strongly influenced most debates on the relevance of education for development (Akintayo, 2013). According to Michael Omolewa, (2000) as cited in Oyebamiji (2009) Human capital theory suggests that there are substantial economic effects of education for social development. The main assumption of human capital theory is that formal education is highly instrumental and even necessary to improve the production capacity of a population (Olaniyan and Okemakinde, 2008). Human capital theorists argue that an educated population is a productive population because education increases the productivity and efficiency of people by increasing the level of cognitive stock of economically productive human capability (Oyebamiji, 2009).

According to Fagerlind and Saha, (1997) as cited in Mtey and Sulle, (2013) human

capital theory provides a basic justification for large public expenditure on education both in developing and developed nations. The main assumption is that education creates skills, which facilitate higher levels of productivity amongst those who possess it when compared with those who do not (Akintayo, 2013). The advocates of this theory believe that those with higher levels of education seem to have, on average, higher levels of productivity (Mtey and Sulle, 2013). The theory further argues that an effective anti-poverty strategy should incorporate the enhancement of education and skills amongst poor households, and that such an approach improves productivity in the informal urban and rural economy. The theory maintains that education promotes the eligibility for paid employment in the formal sector and for their advancement once the people are employed. Similarly, Bowles, Gintis and Oxaal (1997) cited in Akintayo (2013) argue that increasing levels of schooling in the labour force are likely to be functional to the process of employment growth. They also argued that although education is necessary in improving the well-being of the poor and thus contribute to poverty reduction; it has also a tendency of perpetuating inequality in society. O'Hare (1996) and Darby (1996) as cited in Oladapo (2013), also suggest a direct relationship between educational attainment, job opportunities and poverty reduction. They conclude that higher levels of education do not only contribute to productivity and income earnings but also narrow the income gap across gender and racial lines.

Adult Education

Adult education is synonymous with education in general. Both expressions “adult education” and “education” by itself- indicate their goal: the appropriation of a spirit capable of transforming the minds in any place and time. The concept of adult education tends to be thought of as an educational process for adults. However, this is not the sphere in which adult education acts (Obashoro, 2004). Education is adult education for forming adults (Oladapo, 2013). Education is to become mature. Education is the education of children, the youth, adults and elders with the endless aim of forming a responsible being. Though levels of responsibility may vary, what remains and matters is that the response must always be convincing and conveniently committed. The adult education process drives towards the achievement of the capability to individually use reason on the subject matter in question. Adult education is oriented at the use, at any age, of attitudes and skills prone to clarifying any distortions in communication, favouring “why,” “how,” “when” and “where” as well as the “what for” in all situations (Oladapo, 2013). The recommendation on the development of adult education affirms that

civic, political, trade union and co-operative education activities should be aimed particularly towards developing independent and critical judgment and implanting or enhancing the abilities required by each individual in order to

cope with changes affecting living and working conditions, by effective participation in the management of social affairs at every level of the decision making process (UNESCO, 1976:122).

UNESCO (1976) described the concept adult education in the following coordinated words and phrases. It reads thus:

the term “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 adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development (pg. 124).

The most recent definitions of adult education are presented in Adult Education Act (2010) as follows:

- i. Adult education: Any kind of study, solution or counseling that is meant to meet the needs of individuals with short formal

education and is not based on legislation for upper-secondary education or higher education.

- ii. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning: Organised process applied to evaluate formally the general knowledge and competences of an individual. The evaluation may be based on the individual’s education, work experience, vocational training, leisure courses, adult education, social activities and life experience.
- iii. Education and training provider: Independent legal entity that provides adult education and has received accreditation from the Minister of Education, Science and Culture on the basis of this Act.

The Goals of Adult Education

The main goal is to achieve its humanistic and ethical aims in recognising that understanding is more important than knowledge, since only this produces a responsibility towards morals and wisdom (Oladapo, 2013). This leads to the highlight of social function of education, especially, in circumstances which stress the conviction that societies can change with the help of a coordinated human effort. These coordinated efforts (through adult education), will focus education for social responsibility, a civic and political sense, the sense of justice, participation, international understanding and development (Oyebamiji, 2009).

All human training must promote aptitudes for social analysis and the ability to judge

between plural values and contradictory ideologies (Mtey and Sulle, 2013). It would be necessary to train in cultural discernment, avoiding ethical uncertainty and the loss of identity; to learn how to permanently educate in the analysis of prevailing values and the impact on mentalities and behaviours which produce modes of appreciating them. Adult education as a cultural programme embraces the conditions that favour a responsible adaptation to the medium, a critical interaction with the media, the training in decision making, social participation, arts such as music and museums.

Obashoro (2004) identifies that adult education has two main tasks or functions; these are the compensational function and the continual education. The compensational function of adult education comprises fundamental training of adults that is, making up for educational falling behind of adult persons, which are the consequences of educational failures in their youth. While the function for continuous education comprises acquisition of new knowledge, skills and values, attitudes and habits, which will enable adults to successfully cope with new demands, which stem from the scientific, technological, social, political and cultural development (Obashoro, 2004 and Oladapo, 2010). Adult education is an all-embracing educational programme geared towards the all-round development of the human race.

The objectives of adult education according to Adult Education Act (2010) are (i). to provide increased opportunities

for active participation in society to individuals with short formal education, (ii). to provide suitable education and training opportunities to individuals on the labour market, who have short formal education, and enable them to recommence their studies; (iii). to provide individuals with a way to increase their vocational skills and enhance their responsibilities in that respect; (iv). to create the necessary scope and solutions to meet the demands of industry for increased knowledge and competences of employees; (v). to provide adult education to individuals with reduced educational and professional opportunities, taking into account their competences and unequal situation; (vi). to support the recognition of the value of education and training that is acquired outside of the formal education system and; (vii). to increase the general educational level and strengthen the Icelandic education system.

Poverty

Historically, poverty has been viewed mainly in terms of a low level of income among the poor individual or as a slow growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at the macro/national level (Akintayo, 2013). Therefore, in the past, international assessments depended heavily on income levels as the basic measure of poverty. However, there is a universal agreement that the dimensions of poverty far transcend the traditional definition. In line with such an understanding, the Asian Development Bank (2003), which is the major regional financial institution supporting poverty alleviation

programmes in many countries of the Asia-Pacific region, offers the following definition: “Poverty is a deprivation of essential assets and opportunities to which every human is entitled. Everyone should have access to basic education and primary health services”.

The poor and the powerless are capable of discontent, but they are not always able to organize themselves to demand social justice (Mtey and Sulle, (2013). They need help from selfless teachers and activists. In the present context and conditions in the developing and the developed world, adult educators seem to be the best hope for the poor in the world. Unfortunately, while adult educators have understood the deprivations and indignities of the poor living in conditions of poverty, they have been satisfied with offering them dialogue and discussion on education for development, Akintayo (2013).

Poverty encompasses a lot of deficiencies, including inability to get a good job or failure to pursue the job with viability due to lack of sufficient skills and knowledge required to handle the tasks. This is deficiency that can be well tackled through education (URT, 2007). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2002) describes poverty in terms of income, capability and participation, recognising that poverty leads to trauma, powerlessness and shame. The Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC 2000) distinguishes between absolute, relative and subjective poverty.

Other definitions of poverty also tend to reject the notion that poverty is simply

associated with income. It may involve lack of self-determination, self-esteem and participatory democracy. These broader definitions of poverty are succinctly summarized in the following extract from the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Bosnia and Herzegovina (2002):

Until recently poverty was commonly taken to mean insufficient income to buy a minimum basket of goods and services. Today the term is usually understood more broadly as lacking the basic means to live in dignity. It is becoming widely recognised that poverty takes various forms, including the lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or no access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and disease-related mortality; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. Furthermore, restrictions on or lack of participation in the decision-making process and in civil, social and cultural life are also violations of human rights. A multidimensional understanding of poverty helps us define poverty as a human condition characterised by sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

Obviously, the definitions go beyond the traditional indicators of personal income or national macro-economic growth. The broadening of the concept of poverty has come about in the context of a new understanding of development as improvement in human well-being, which Sen (1999) and other economists have articulated over the past decade. The expanded definition has been adopted in the human development reports of the UNDP (2001). Multidimensional definitions of poverty have implications for adult education programmes, particularly when it comes to monitoring and evaluating poverty.

It is important first to recognise that poverty does not have a uniform manifestation. The poor comprise a very large number of varied groups and cannot simply be labeled as those “living below the poverty line” (Mtey and Sulle, 2013). Poverty and its causes are context and region-specific. For instance, it affects rural and urban areas differentially. Rural areas are still where the majority of the poor live (about 900 million of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty are in rural areas). Lack of water, poor access to education and agricultural research, and inadequate land reforms are major factors hindering progress. Environmental degradation continues to deepen poverty, and over time poor people can become trapped in a downward spiral (Sen, 1999). The problems arising from lack of access to technology, infrastructure and social services are exacerbated by market distortions that reduce profits (International Fund for Agricultural

Development 2002). Although education is a primary factor in bringing people out of poverty, education for children of poor families is often sacrificed due to the need for their labour, thus contributing to the vicious cycle of poverty. The most vulnerable and marginalized are generally also the poorest. Seventy percent of the world’s poor are females. In the less developed countries in 1997, fewer than 4 out of 10 women could neither read nor write as compared with 6 out of 10 men. Although women produce most of the food in poor regions, they have limited voice in community decision-making. Poverty is also both a cause and a consequence of disability, with 50% of disability problems thought to be linked to poverty (DFID, 2000).

Adult Education and Poverty Eradication

Adult education is about empowerment, and ultimately poverty reduction is also about empowerment. Both involve issues of sustainability, participatory control, and the use of indigenous knowledge systems, local governance and development as participatory action. Adult education may take three distinct forms: formal, non-formal or informal. Formal education is usually learning that leads to certification. It can be part-time or full-time, but is always institutionally based (Obashoro 2004, Oyebamiji, 2009 and Oladapo 2010, 2013,). Non-formal education refers to the range of targeted learning opportunities that are offered outside of educational institutions but are nevertheless organized to achieve particular learning outcomes.

Non-formal education can include work-based skills training, community education workshops or any specific learning programme. Informal education is often connected to projects in which education is not the main priority, but which result in increased knowledge, skills and understanding. Such programmes may also provide opportunities for non-formal education, but more often they involve self-directed learning or engagement with others on an informal basis. Examples of informal education include “operating a new piece of equipment in the work-place, or attending a community meeting on land reform (Government of Namibia 2003: 5). Poverty reduction through adult education is an enabling process. Adult education, in conjunction with other initiatives, builds capacity for self-advocacy (Aremu, 2014). The focus of adult education may vary, thus affecting its impact. It may have a political focus and raise awareness about human rights, as well as national and international affairs. Alternatively or additionally, it may address economic disempowerment, particularly if the learning content is relevant to local needs. A social focus encompasses a spirit of sharing and collective action. An environmental focus can validate the use of indigenous knowledge and enable natural, holistic approaches to sustainability (Mosweunyane 2002). Education is a key ingredient in poverty reduction (Mtey and Sulle, 2013). However, as the Millennium Development Goals show, the emphasis is often on basic education and literacy rather than lifelong or continuing education. On the other

hand, investing in the education of girls and women results in positive returns to the learners themselves and society as a whole. The effects last for generations in the form of enhanced earning capacity, increased access and opportunities in the labour market, reduced health risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth, and often greater control by women over their own lives (Mtey and Sulle, 2013). Many of these arguments would also apply to people with disabilities; they are rarely included in poverty reduction plans. Such plans need participatory educational approaches that aim to empower, integrate, change attitudes and increase opportunities for independence. Traditional community social systems need to be adapted to ensure social inclusion of women and other marginalised groups if these systems are to be a resource for inclusive, participatory community education and development. Similarly, NGOs are a potential resource for community-based empowerment if they respect principles of grassroots engagement.

Adult education alone cannot eliminate poverty in all its ramifications but creditably can contribute to skills development or empowerment, or both. Successful adult education programmes require grassroots, bottom-up development in a participatory, partnership-based approach that recognizes indigenous knowledge systems and involves the poorest countries in global debates on lifelong learning.

The interdisciplinary curriculum for the eradication of poverty should incorporate the following elements: Literacy and

numeracy – Arabic; Personal and environmental hygiene; Business mathematics; Computer literacy; Foreign language – English; Principles of project management; Book keeping and simple accounting; Office skills; Recreation; Theatre arts: Plays, songs, puppet theatre, poetry. The cross-sectoral development in adult education initiatives should, therefore, encompass the following: income generation; credit; vocational skills; primary healthcare; reproductive health and family planning; handicrafts; marketing; community mobilization/leadership training; advocacy and Training of trainers.

Conclusion:

This study examines the link between adult education and poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The study identifies poverty factors as ignorance, illiteracy, poor health access which generally located in the rural populations in Nigeria. The authors establish that majority of the poor populations are women and that most of the poor are illiterates. The paper further established that adult education through the know-how in health care, sanitation and nutrition, will improve people's standard of living, adult basic education will yield high rates on investment thereby enhancing labour productivity. Also, adult education will bring about an increase in active participation at the grassroots level. Based on the benefits of adult education, the following recommendations are made: that adult education should be given due recognition by the federal, state and local governments; adult education is what must be taught in all modules of education and

all social sectors; the management of all adult education programmes must be strictly monitored by the stakeholders. The final objective must be to equip man to play his part harmoniously in the modern world.

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