

REDUCING THE PROBLEM OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL INCIDENCE IN NIGERIA: THE MISSION AND VISION OF ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Educating the children is a way by which we can prevent the marginalized adulthood and make them to be self-reliant and responsible citizens. However, most children in Nigeria leaves school without completing formal education. This phenomenon will not only affect their personal life but also affect the society as a whole and contribute to increment in the number of illiterates in the nearest future. However, the attendants' benefits of adult literacy education have been seen to translate into inputs and values for out-of-school children and the communities. It is in the light of this position that this paper examined adult literacy education, the challenges of adult literacy education, factors responsible for out-of-school incidence in Nigeria, the mission and vision of adult literacy education and the relevance of adult literacy education to the mitigation of out-of-school incidence in Nigeria. The paper concludes that adult literacy education is capable of reducing the incidence of out-of-school children in Nigeria. It recommended among others that government should give more support to adult literacy education programmes because it is capable of integrating out-of-school children back to school, bring about their personal development and make them functional by contributing their quota to the overall development of the country in general.

Keywords: Out-of-School children, adult literacy education, non-formal education.

Introduction

The overall goal of education is to make an individual more useful to self, community, and the nation (Ojo, 2015; Okemakinde and Ogunyinka, 2018). Education prepared an individual's mind to be internally consistent and harmonious, thus developing the right type of personality required for living in the society. The right of individuals to educational programme that respect their

personality, talents, abilities, and cultural heritage has been upheld in various International agreements, including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the 1959 Declaration of the Right of the Child; World Declarations on Education for All (EFA) at Jomtien (1990); World Conference on Education for All (sponsored by UNESCO and held in Dakar, Senegal in 2000) that goal was however postponed until 2015, just to

mention but a few in which Nigeria is a signatory to, with the major aim of promoting education as a basic right for the citizen of the country. In essence, the economic and social transformation of the Nigerian society depends on the success of the education sector.

Despite this, many Nigerian children still dropout of school. Dropout of school can be defined as leaving school without completion to a formal qualification awarded. Dropout problem does not only affect the individual education but also the society as a whole. Most of the children who dropout of school experience job opportunities, earnings, social and income problems that may impair their abilities to productive career in future (Fall and Roberts, 2012; Ruby, 2018). As a result of this, most communities have therefore suffered from lack of productive workers and higher cost associated with incarceration, health care, and other social services because of the drop-out problem. In addition, some children are out of school as a result of financial constraints, ignorance, lack of interest, large family sizes, inability to cope in school, quest for material wealth, just to mention but a few (Okemakinde and Ogunyinka, 2018).

UNESCO (2005) stated that in the early 21st century about 860 million were illiterate in Sub-Saharan Africa due to inadequate education which accounted for majority of the illiterate adults in the region. Iyanda, Olufayo & Savage (2018) quoting the 2015 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) revealed that Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world. According to the report, 10.5 million Nigerian children which accounts for 47 percent of the world's population are out-of-school. World's out-of-school children released by UNESCO (2018), revealed little or no progress, with about 258 million children, adolescents

and youths out-of-school in 2018. UNICEF (2022) stated that 1 in 3 children are out-of-school children in Nigeria: 0.2 million at the primary level and 8.1 million at the junior secondary school. (JSS1) level. 12.4 million Children never attended school and 5.9 million left school early. Nigeria's out-of-school population accounts for 15% of the global total. Azuka (2024) quoting UNICEF (2022) report on Nigeria out-of-school-children. The report noted that North West has a total of 8,044,800; the North East 5,064,400; the North Central, has 2,115,800; the South West has 1,146,900; the South South has 431,300 and the South East has 240,200 out-of-school-children. By implication, Nigeria has the largest number of out-of-school-children in the world.

In the same vein, World Education Blog, (2022), submitted that Nigeria holds the unenviable position of being the country with the largest population of out-of-school children of primary school age: 9.6 million in 2020, up from 6.4 million in 2000 and 7.5 million in 2010. UNESCO (2023) stated that 20 million children and youth are out of school in Nigeria, 98 million, out-of-school in sub-Saharan Africa. According to Veriv Africa (2024), UNICEF, reports that Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world, with over 18.3 million children not enrolled. Corroborating this submission, Tahir and Obasi (2015), observed that the Nigerian government is systematically failing to address the persistent educational marginalization through her various policies which led to high level of out-of-school children.

Despite the high level of out-of-school children in Nigeria as revealed above, there is no doubt the fact that efforts were made by successive Nigerian government to correct the educational injustice in the country,

created various avenue for out-of-school children to be reintegrated into formal education system; access to formal education for the youths was increased; education system was restructured to rectify significant imbalances; Adult Basic Education Training (ABET) and a revitalized form of technical education were provided; these also became providers of basic education for those who could not be reintegrated into the school system (Mosdell, 1994; Harrison & Chisholm, 1999 and Tahir and Obasi (2015). Yet children continue to leave school without completing their studies. However, since education is a right to all the citizens in the country, it requires that all citizens develop competencies for life and work; therefore, providing a successful educational system that is impartial, accessible, and flexible based on cooperation, not competition is important to the nation's stability, social and economic development (Darling-Hammond, 1997). There is therefore the need for intervention on the issue of 'drop-out' children in the country.

The importance of adult literacy education cannot be over-emphasized, it is the type of education that would help the dropout to discover their talents and build their lives based on their talents; a flexible education system where learning activities are based on students' needs and legitimate interests rather than rigid curriculum. Compared to formal education which, as a result of its restrictive scope and coverage, tends to limit the extent to which beneficiaries can be independent to explore the environment and query existing reality, literacy education offers the clientele a means for self-realization (UNICEF, 2018). It equips participants with skills, attitudes, and values that will enable him function properly in the society; equips the

participants to bring about useful changes in the society.

Adult Literacy Education

The concept 'out-of-school' refers to persons, especially school-aged children and youth who have either never been to school or enrolled in formal primary/secondary schools and dropped out without completing their programme of study.

Some of the factors responsible for the problem of out-of-school include:

- ❖ Some children are out of school as a result of poverty, ignorance, lack of interest, inability to cope in school, unbridled quest for money to mention but a few.
- ❖ Parents who are illiterates or even not sufficiently literate, and greedy often do not recognize their responsibilities to send their children to school.
- ❖ Undue peer influence affects children's participation in school activities.
- ❖ Poor school environment, inadequate facilities leading to education of poor quality that does not provide children with saleable competencies drive away children from school.
- ❖ Teachers, who are poorly trained, poorly motivated with high pupil/teacher ratio often led to their poor performance thereby discouraging students from attending school.
- ❖ The curriculum is sometimes overloaded and not relevant to the needs of the child.
- ❖ The community's failure to own educational programmes constitutes a significant factor in school dropout.
- ❖ The value system which places too much emphasis on the acquisition of wealth to the detriment of other factors that makes for good society such that as honesty,

steadfastness, integrity and so on is also a factor responsible for school drop-out (NMEC/UNICEF, 2010; UNESCO, 2023).

It is against this background that this paper intends to examine the role of adult literacy education in reducing out-of-school incidences in Nigeria.

There is no doubt the fact that opportunity for meaningful education is a basic human right. This is in line with Tahir and Obasi (2015), who established that education, is increasingly recognized as an overarching right that is not only fundamental but indispensable for the realization of all right. In the view of Moyo (2014), the desire of most Nigerians is for the country to take her rightful place in the global economy, politics, and development, and to provide decent living conditions for its citizens (irrespective of their status) in order to optimize their potentials. The type of education that can fit in is adult literacy education.

Adult literacy education encompasses much more than reading, writing and simple arithmetic. It includes the ability to analyse things, understand general ideas or terms, use symbols in complex ways, apply theories and perform other necessary life skills-including the ability to engage in the social and economic life of the society (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). It is a form of education that is flexible in nature and highly encompassing. It is a form of education that is capable of integrating out-of-school children back into the society and make them functional by contributing to their personal as well as national development. According to Runberger (1987) & Ruby (2018), it deals with how people actually use such skills to live and work in the society. It also deals with how an individual uses the skills, knowledge and ideas acquired through education and

learning to achieve his goals, and contribute to his personal, as well as social, society and national development

Adult literacy education is also very important not only for personal development but also for positive educational, social and economic outcomes. Literate people are able to cope with work and life in the society where there is a high demand for literacy skills (Adedokun, 2015). It affects peoples' lives directly; impacting on their chances of employment, improving level of income and type of occupation, poverty alleviation. According to Sarumi (2009), higher literacy skills can lead to better jobs, increased income and greater productivity.

The mission and vision of Adult Literacy Education

Adult literacy education provides opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and life practices relevant to promote the sustainability of national development. That is why Iyanda, Olufayo & Savage (2018), submit that adult literacy education embraces all forms of education provided for working men and women, housewives and others, who for one reason or the other are willing to improve the quality of their education.

According to Sarumi (2009) and UNICEF (2022), the mission and vision of adult literacy education include the following:

1. Adult literacy education expands the consciousness and horizon of man. It increases man's power of thinking, enables his/her to improve his environment and society. He becomes liberated from the restraints and limitations of ignorance.
2. It enlightens the people especially the illiterate's ones: When you

literalize the people particularly the adults, they become enlightened or informed and encouraged to build a new set of communities in their areas. This will prompt them to supporting governmental development programmes.

3. It helps to articulate the needs of people: The introduction of adult literacy in the targeted areas has made people aware of their rights, articulate their needs by playing roles in the development of their society and the nation at large. Adult literacy education also helps the neo-literates to utilize the best use of whatever the government provides to help them improve on their lives and profession.
4. It facilitates the knowledge of the target audience on the importance of cooperative societies: Adult literacy education will make the participants to understand the importance of cooperative societies. Middlemen can now be avoided, as the farmers through producers' cooperatives can purchase fertilizers directly from the government.
5. Adult literacy helps to understand population education, social obligations and so on: the government is interested in the control of overpopulation through family planning, the need to drink pure water, eat balanced diet and so on. The neo-literate's people will no doubt appreciate the efforts of the government in the provision of social amenities as well as take good care of them.

The challenges of Adult Literacy Education provision in Nigeria

- Politicization of adult literacy education: Adult literacy education programmes is a victim of prejudice and ignorance of the political class

in Nigeria. Majority of these politicians could not understand the relevance of adult literacy education to national development as they erroneously regarded it as education of the aged; hence, it is not given the appropriate attention required of this type of education (Moyo, 2014).

- Poor funding of adult literacy structures at local, state and federal levels, especially the apex body, the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education Commission (NMEC).
- Non-payment of adult literacy facilitators in an economy where people have not embraced volunteerism, perhaps, due to poverty and poor economy.
- Lack of reliable data on adult literacy education programmes.
- Minimum impact of adult literacy programmes on its target population.
- Paucity of qualified personnel in the area of adult literacy education
- Volunteerism on the part of facilitators and the target population: that the tutors and target population operate on voluntary basis has turned out to be problematic. Both groups in most cases do not attach the seriousness deserved to the programme making them to withdraw at will.

Adult literacy Education and Out-of-School children in Nigeria

There is no doubt the fact that formal education has failed to take care of out-of-school children but adult literacy education readily comes to the front burner as a remedy. In her own view, Ojo (2015) reiterated the fact that the current focus of adult literacy education is life-long learning, for learning to be, learning to live and learning to do. Adult literacy education becomes the centre of attraction. It is

education for community development; social welfare and extension education are ready tools to meet the fundamental education needs of the out-of-school children. Out-of-school children who could not keep up or bear the harsh learning environment of the formal education programme in Nigeria can now enroll in adult literacy education programmes.

Adult literacy education has the capacity of creating awareness and knowledge of the magnitude, pattern, dimension and contributory causes of drop-out syndrome. The grave and threatening effects of the syndrome to the social and economic stability of the family, the community and the nation can be well understood by many people more than ever before through adult literacy education. Increase in enrollment, retention and completion rates of out-of-school children can be achieved through adult literacy programmes. Sensitization and mobilization visits can be carried out in target communities.

Participation in adult literacy education would enable out-of-school children to be better equipped to face future challenges of life and enable them to be self-reliant through exposure to skill acquisition and income generating activities embedded in adult literacy education programmes. In essence, adult literacy education:

- contributes to increasing access to and retention in Basic Education for out-of-school children in the country.
- contributes to reducing the gender gaps nationally to less than 10 percent (NMEC & UNICEF, 2010).
- provides opportunities in Basic Education for about 50,000 out-of-school children each year in the South-Eastern state alone through the establishment of about 1,000

adult literacy centres (NMEC & UNICEF, 2010).

According to Adedokun (2015), quoting Manitoba Education and Training (2000) the knowledge, skills and life practices acquired through adult literacy education would enable out-of-school children to:

- be committed to a lifestyle consistent with the principles of sustainability;
- take personal responsibility for a sustainable future and work towards an equitable of life for all;
- think critically about global issues and take action locally;
- advocate for strong economy and for government policies that support a strong economy; and
- understand the consequences of unequal distribution of power, inequalities in the sharing and distribution of global resources, and the impacts of rampant consumption, consumerism, and built-in obsolescence and live in such a way as to lessen the impact of the consequences.

Adult literacy education becomes important to out-of-school children when one views basic facts about this type of education: out-of-school children with lower literacy level are more likely to be more reliant on people/public for assistance and this does not make for either personal or community development; when out-of-school children attend adult literacy education programmes, he not only develops himself but also his future because he will be able to enlighten his children early in life of the importance of literacy education, thus equipping them with basic literacy skills before real school life; when out-of-school children are not literate it may result in criminal activities and juvenile delinquency (Adedokun, 2015; UNICEF, 2022).

Conclusion

Considering all efforts made to solve the problem of out-of-school children, it appears that formal education alone cannot achieve the said goal. There is the need to include other forms of education, which would reduce if not total eradication of out-of-school incidence in the country. This paper therefore established the fact that adult literacy education is the best means of reintegrating them into school and help in reducing out-of-school problems in the country.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proffered to build a good atmosphere for adult literacy education in reducing if not total eradication of out-of-school problems in Nigeria:

- i. Government at all levels should be more committed in implementing and funding adult literacy education policies. Most especially, they should match actions with necessary legislation. It must also attract collaboration through international cooperation. Sustained international cooperation entails facilitating and stimulating development that would bring about exchange of information, ideas and so on.
- ii. More capacity building programmes for adult literacy education personnel at all levels should be put in place. Effective programming and implementation would require appropriately qualified personnel with definite schedules of duty through pre-service, in-service and on-the-job training.
- iii. Government at all levels in the country need to create enabling environment that will enhance the implementation of adult literacy

policies and programmes. Making loans available to participants who engaged in skill acquisition programmes should be a welcome development.

- iv. Attitudinal change about adult literacy education should be encouraged among the citizenry, particularly among out-of-school children.

- v. Government should give more support to adult literacy education programmes because it is capable of integrating out-of-school children back into the society and make them functional by contributing to their personal development in particular and the country in general. It must have the potential for transformation in all relevant spheres of economic development of out-of-school children. This must be attended by flexible and permeable learning pathways in a developing economy.

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