

## IMPLICATIONS OF ADULT EDUCATION FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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### **Abstract**

*Adult education is the practice of adults engaging in systematic and continuous self-education activities to acquire new types of information, skills, attitudes, or values. It is different from child education. On this note, the common consensus is that education contributes positively to both socio-economic development and development overall. Adult education enhances progression into other learning. There is strong evidence that successful learning engagement encourages subsequent learning. For an adult to sustainably balance to meet the 21<sup>st</sup> century socio-economic attainment he/she needs a functional literacy approach. This could be considered the usefulness of any literacy programme to the learners. It should answer questions such as: Will the adult learners use the knowledge acquired for immediate economic benefit? Do the skills provided for the learners enhance their productivity level subsequently? Can the learner function better now after the learning in such a manner that people within the community can feel the effect positively? If so, then the adult learners can be said to be functionally literate. This paper views adult education as an indispensable tool for the attainment of socio-economic transformation. It also examines the concept of adult education, adult education and socio-economic transformation, challenges and the way forward to better equip adult education programmes for meaningful socio-economic development of the nation. It concludes that adults with required knowledge, attitudes and skills needed sustainable socio-economic*

*transformation. This paper also recommends among others that computer literacy, trade, vocation, skills and or entrepreneurship, should be rigorously funded and invested in for economic advancement, self-reliance, self-employment, independence and self-help in order to increase income, improve living standards and to attain poverty reduction, especially, for the adults and the vulnerable groups in Nigeria, to fit into the world of works and to cope with globalization and its attendant benefits.*

**Keywords:** *Adult Education, Socio-Economic Transformation, Environmental Sustainability*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Every human being has the right to education. Education is the light without which the world will be in darkness. It is the basis for scientific and technological development of any country. Education is, therefore, a real key to adult education programmes and to build human capacity, be it in the rural environment or the urban setting. This is because education is universally recognized as one of the fundamental building blocks for human development and poverty reduction. For adults to improve their standard of living, they must be given functional literacy education that will empower them for community development.

It is worthy of note that majority of Nigerians are dwelling in rural communities where there is dearth of facilities that give minimum comfort for living. The rural communities are characterized with clownish agricultural activities that lead to loss of the biological and economic productivity and complexity of rain-fed crop land, irrigated cropland, range, forest and woodlands resulting from land uses or from a combination of processes arising from human activities and habitation patterns such as soil erosion, caused by wind or water, deterioration of physical, chemical, biological and economic properties of soil and long-term loss of natural vegetation (Patrick, & Omang 2022). Also, high level literacy, poverty, ignorance and superstitious

belief system that retard modern development (Eleberi, Mbadiwe & Kosioma, 2014). The sustainable development report 2018 analyses gain all through the 0.33 year of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. This highlights achievements and ongoing demanding situations across all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), primarily based on the contemporary evidence to be heard. It discusses a number of the interconnections between priorities and goals, while people are living better lives common than they had been a decade ago, progress toward making sure that no person is left at the back, because it is no longer sufficient to satisfy the 2030 Agenda targets. (Onnoghen, Aganyi, Omang, Obibessong & Asor 2020).

It is pertinent to note that a lot of social issues and problems such as illiteracy, insecurity, crime, ethnicity problems, environmental issues, poverty, population growth, pollution, climate change, deforestation, erosion, flooding, thuggery, drug addict, child abuse, kidnapping, electoral violence and the like which are being faced today in the society are the result of unemployment. Street boys/girls should be given opportunity or encouraged to interface and articulate programmes such as functional literacy and vocational development that will give them a lease of life. This will enhance their socio-economic well-being and reduce the

tendency of rural urban drift. One area of academic study, adult education, is tasked with finding solutions to a variety of problems, including those relating to socio-economics, culture, politics, and the environment. Socio-economics aimed at ending poverty, sexual crime, drugs abuse, cultism, reduction of environmental social violence, income inequality, lack of education and negligence etc. (Omang, Patrick, Obibessong & Ojong 2023). Cultural issues have to do with the way of life of the people living in a given geographical area with their norms and beliefs to balance and implement sound policies to foster the key factors and alleviate the distortions or threats among the people. Also, attention have to be given to various socio-economic indicators such as cultural values, education, employment, health, transportation, trade (both regional and international trade), energy, industrial growth and the general welfare of the public, while Omang et al (2023) further assert that political issues are overwhelming experience in Nigeria with political and financial repercussions. This experience is categorized by crisis, conflict, dispute, rebellion, violence and even war which affect political development. Because of the political unrest, there has been an increase in thuggery. These thugs operate primarily in gangs and target, terrorize, intimidate, and harm innocent people in addition to politicians. Ojong, Onnoghen, Omang and Ogban (2022) view environmental issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that has to do with international and national environmental organization projecting new and emerging environmental problems, introduce challenging situations and solutions which require urgent actions. These include;

mega trends in continued economic growth, population urbanization and ageing, global diseases burdens, accelerating introduction of new technologies (artificial intelligence, robots, deep learning) alternative energy sources, depleted natural resources, worrying signs of climate change, tropical forest degradation, and the need for introduction of sustainable goals, and circular economy solutions for the future. Umar, Eshak, Bichi & Aujara (2010) cited in Hussain (2013) state that because of the favourable correlation between adult education programmes and higher levels of knowledge and skills as well as self-esteem, people are more likely to take an active role in their own growth. According to Omolewa (2019), the duty of adult education is to break the barriers to learning for every individual and provide access to education.

### ***Literature review***

#### **Adult Education**

Adults engage in systematic and ongoing self-educational activities which is distinct from child education, in order to acquire new kinds of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values. It also includes any type of education received or delivered to adult men and women (formal, informal or non-formal). The idea of adult education has been discussed from a variety of angles. This is due to the fact that everyone's definition of adult education is unique. The ambiguity surrounding the definition of adult education, according to Adekola (2008), results from differing perceptions of the functions that adult education fulfills in various sectors of the national development. He also pointed out that the term "adult education" is often used in place of other words. For instance, adult education may

mean workers' education or liberal education for relaxation or entertainment in advanced nations like the United States of America or the United Kingdom, while it may mean basic literacy, extracurricular studies, or mass education for community development in a developing country like Nigeria. Nzeneri (2008:10) in Ugwu, and Mbalisi (2016), sees adult education as “any education given to adults based on their social life. In order to fully enable people to respond to changes and obstacles in their life and society, they may have political, cultural, or economic demands or problems”. He further asserts that functional training/vocational programmes are required by adults who constitute the illiterate, unskilled, semi-skilled or semi-professional labour force to remedy, not only their educational deficiencies, but also meet the needs of their various occupations whether as farmers, artisans or employees of corporate/private organizations.

A definition considered more balanced, encompassing, comprehensive and elaborate was given by UNESCO in its 1976 conference. UNESCO, according to Brown and Tomori (1979), defines adult education as the entire body of organized educational process, whatever the content, level and methods whether formal or otherwise, whether they promote or replace initial education in schools, colleges or universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby person's regarded as an adult 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 attitudes or behaviour in the two fold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and

cultural development. This definition harmonized the various components of patches of definition that were existing before 1976 and formed the foundation on which various discrete new definitions of adult educations emanated. In order to help adults fully adapt to changes and challenges in their life and society, Nzeneri (2008) defines adult education as any education provided to adults based on their social, political, cultural, and economic requirements and problems.

Adult education according to Mbalisi (2010) is any educative and purposeful learning activity organized for adults to initiate them into a new way of life by providing them with relevant skills, competences, knowledge, information and attitudes required to excel in that aspect of life. The above definitions portray adult education towards solving societal problems, and hence, fostering necessary social and economic transformation or change.

Adult education can be viewed as the systematic process of teaching adults to acquire new values, attitude, knowledge and skills to enable them cope with challenges in their lives and to contribute to societal development.

### **Objectives of Adult Education in Nigeria**

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004), stipulated the objectives of Adult and Non-Formal Education in the National Policy on Education. These include:

- For adults and children who never had the benefit of formal education or who did not complete their elementary education, functional literacy and continuing education are provided.
- Providing functional and remedial education to children who have

prematurely left the formal education system.

- The provision of additional education for various groups of graduates of the formal education system in order to enhance their foundational knowledge and abilities.
- Providing various types of workers and professionals with in-service, on-the-job, vocational, and professional training in order to enhance their skills and competency.
- Provide the country's adult residents with the civic, cultural, and artistic education they need for the benefit of the general public.

### **Socio-Economic Transformation**

The word socio-economic is a compound word consisting of two adjectives- social and economic. To understand the term socio-economic transformation, one needs to define the two words separately on the basis of transformation, that is, social transformation and economic transformation.

Social transformation refers to large scale social changes, that is changes in individual or group standing in relation to other people in society (social structure or class), as well as changes in social status and corresponding functions of members of society (social function) as demanded by the social order of the particular institution of society (social institution) to which the individuals or groups belong (family, polity, economy, school etc.). While economic transformation refers to the continuous process of moving labour and other resources within and across production sectors (including agriculture, manufacturing and services) for the

purpose of bringing about large-scale social changes through overall economic advancement Wikipedia (2019). Omang, Ojong, Anthony and Kujoh (2021) opine that economic development also refers to the process by which the overall health, well-being, and academic level of the general population improves. During the development, there is a population shift from agriculture to industry, and then to services. A longer average life expectancy, for example, in one of the results of economic development. Improved productivity, higher literacy rates, and better public education, are also consequences of economic development. Therefore, Investopedia (2020), defines socio-economic transformation as a process through which the major contribution to income, output, employment and gross domestic of the economy is generated from sectors other than agriculture, such as manufacturing, small scale industries, information and communication technology, capital intensive industries etc.

Mpango (2012) views socio-economic transformation as the process in which an increasing proportion of economic output and employment is generated within and across different production sectors. Thus, creating large scale social transformation through a shift from agriculture based societies to urban, industrial and/or service based economic with sustained high Gross Domestic Products (GDP) growth rates resulting from improved access to quality education and skills development, improved per capita income and incidental reduction in poverty.

Indices of Socio-economic transformation include:

- Improved infrastructure facilities
- Improved production capacities
- Improved standard of living
- Presence of improved social services
- Transition from primary to secondary production
- Improved level of awareness
- Availability of basic amenities
- Efficient management of resources/ good governance

Analysis of the above definition reveals that quality and functional education/training for capacity development and occupational mobility are keys to socio-economic transformation. Adult education in line with its objective has an important role to play in socio-economic transformation on environmental sustainability because of its various relevant functional education and skills development programmes.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

**Sustainability:** This is the capacity to exist and advance without consuming present-day natural resources. Sustainability in business refers to conducting operations without having an adverse influence on the environment, a local community, or society at large. According to UNESCO point of view, education sustainable development (ESD) responses to the urgent and dramatic challenges the planet faces. Because of how drastically the effects of human activity on the planet's ecosystems have changed them, our basic survival now appears to be in jeopardy. (UNESCO Education Sustainable Development for 2030 toolbox). Odok and Omang (2021) believe that humans will be willing to adopt the new ethic for sustainable living

only when they are persuaded to do so and when they are enabled to obtain the required knowledge, skills, attitude and predisposition and this can only be achieved through environmental awareness. As culture building animals, man made possible their very highly evolved brains, undertake forms of learning to attain increased control of the environment. This learning which could be self-directed in that it activates man to impact upon the living environment as he attempts to explore and exploit the natural resources of the environment to serve his ends.

### **Implication of Adult Education for Socio-Economic Transformation on Environmental Sustainability**

The relevance of adult education in socio-economic transformation in terms of social change, mobility of labour, general socio-economic development as well reduction in poverty cannot be over emphasized today in Nigeria.

Nigeria is a nation that is richly endowed with a large population of people with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The country is blessed with a range of geographical features, expenses of vegetation with different mangrove swamps and the equatorial rainforest zone in the south to semi desert in the North. This is traversed by rivers of various sizes and interspersed with hills, mountain ranges and waterfalls. According to Ugwu and Mbalisi (2016), the central responsibility of adult education is the fostering of social change. This responsibility is discharged through adjustment of the adult population to change by equipping them with necessary awareness of current and imminent changes in the community and the

necessity for such changes, as well as the knowledge and skills to participate in adopting or adapting to the changes. The promotion of democratic development may be a potent weapon for maintaining peace and security. During the fifth international conference on adult education, a number of policies that support democracy and peace were offered (UNESCO, 1997). They are to attain their objectives through various strategies that promote an active civic society, reinforce gender democracy and help to solve conflicts between different individuals, groups and countries.

Employability and income are two important ways that adult learning can help people enjoy a variety of benefits. They give people the ability to somewhat control and influence the environment in which they live, work, and even rise in social standing. Feinstein; Hammond & Bynner (2003) find out that adult learning is associated with more open minded perspective on race and authority, greater understanding of people from different backgrounds, challenging previously held belief and academically oriented courses in particular are most suited for opening minds and generally link adult learning to more racial tolerance, a decrease in political cynicism, and a greater tendency toward democratic attitudes. The attitudinal changes of an educated adult may be different from those of an uneducated one.

Concerns over the dwindling voter turnout and civic engagement are widespread in many nations. It is feasible that adult education will cause a shift in perspective, which will then result in a change in conduct. Learning can increase citizenship and foster social cohesiveness,

according to a number of studies (including field 2009 and OECD, 2007). The government, and better civic engagement may all be supported through adult learning.

Since adult education has the potential to significantly impact many aspects of poverty, it has been suggested that it is essential to lowering levels of poverty globally (UNESCO-UIL, 2009 in EAEA, 2010). Findings indicate that adult education played a part in developing the knowledge and skills required to lower the likelihood of poverty and provide the capacity to endure pressures that lead to poverty. Additionally, the United Kingdom's inquiry into the future of lifelong learning (IFLL) (Sabates, 2008) concludes that adult learning can significantly reduce poverty by improving poor people's health, employment prospects, and chances of acquiring the tools they need to run their own businesses.

Adult education can impact health in a transformative and sustained way, according to empirical research (Jinna and Maikano, 2014). They contend that whereas sustaining effects occur when healthy behaviour is maintained, transforming effects occur when adult learning modifies health habits (for example, switching from smoking to non-smoking). Those who take adult education classes are more likely to maintain healthy lifestyles because, for instance, they are more likely to remain non-smokers. There is also a body of scholarship that discusses the relationship between adult learning and mental health. Also, the benefits of educated parents throughout generations on their children's health are quite important (Manniner 2008).

Adult education enhances progression into other learning. There is a strong evidence that successful learning engagement encourages subsequent learning. For an adult to sustainably balance to meet the 21<sup>st</sup> century socio-economic attainment, he/she needs a functional literacy approach. This could be considered the usefulness of any literacy programme to the learners. It should answer questions such as: Will the adult learners use the knowledge acquired for immediate economic benefit? Do the skill provided to the learners enhance their productivity level subsequently? Can the learner function better now after the learning in such a manner that people within the community can feel the effect positively? If so, then the adult learners can be said to be functionally literate. The concept “functional literacy” became popularized after the 1965 Teheran and UNESCO conference on Adult Education. Mannihen (2010) discovers that course participants reported feeling inspired to learn more as a result of their involvement. In addition, students characterize their development by citing practical tasks they can now complete in a number of settings, including the community and the classroom. These learning outcomes enhance their quality of life and contribute to their sense of self as learners.

**Implication:** Environmental Education, according to Eneji, Otu, Ita, Onnoghen, Ojong, Esuabana, Petters, Aro, Essien, Omini and Monity (2023), have the following implications:

- a) Awareness to aid in social groups and individuals developing sensitivity and awareness to the overall environment and related issues.

- b) Knowledge - to assist social organizations and individuals in acquiring a fundamental comprehension of the environment and the issues it is related with.
- c) Attitude that encourages social groups and individuals to develop a set of values, feelings of environmental concern, and the drive to take an active role in environmental conservation and improvement.
- d) Helping social organizations and people develop the abilities to recognize and address environmental challenges.
- e) Participation is intended to give people, communities, and societies the means and inspiration to actively engage in environmental sustainability on all fronts. This participation includes the individual taking up careers in environmentally related organizations where the skills and values acquired can be used to solve environmental problems, while preventing the occurrence of new ones.

The contribution of adult education to economic growth or transformation cannot be underestimated. Using data form, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), indicated the relationship between educational attainment, literacy skills and economic growth. It has shown among other results, which direct measures of human capital based on Literacy scores perform better than year of schooling indicators when explaining growth in output per capita and per worker (Statistics Canada, 2005). The implication of this is that raising the average level of literacy skills could yield larger economic

returns. This clearly implies that investment in adult education is a good strategy for economic transformation/growth.

It is apparent from the foregoing that adult education is an indispensable tool for social, economic and political transformation in any nation.

### **Challenges Confronting Adult Education in Nigeria**

Adult education is confronted with a lot of problems as an effective tool for socio-economic transformation in Nigeria. Among these problems are:

1. **Misconception about the notion of adult education in the society:** Adult education has been misconstrued to be a night school meant for old men and women that are about to die. This misconception has affected the effectiveness of adult education in carrying out the task of socio-economic transformation of the country.
2. **Poor budgetary allocation:** Education generally is poorly budgeted for in Nigeria's annual budget. This invariably affects adult education as an arm of education. UNESCO recommends that 26% of every nation's annual budget should be allocated to education while Global Campaign for Education (GCE) recommends that not less than 3% of every nation's annual budget for education should be allocated to adult education. But the highest Nigeria has got in the terms of budgetary allocation to education was 10% in the year 2012. Both UNESCO's and GCE's

recommendations have not been met even for adult education.

3. **Inadequate infrastructure:** Basic infrastructure to execute adult education programmes is grossly inadequate due to lack of fund. This has led to the closure of many adult education centres, as well as hindered the progress in the achievement of the objectives of adult education programmes.
4. **Inadequate trained personnel:** There are not enough trained personnel for the implementation of adult education programmes in Nigeria. Most of the adult education personnel are not trained in the principles, theories and practices of adult education, thereby not able to realize the objectives of adult education in Nigeria.
5. **Inadequate instructional materials:** This has resulted in the use of instructional materials meant for children in the formal school sector. Therefore, adult learners are discouraged from active participation in their learning programmes. This is because most of the adults see themselves as being reduced to the status of the children those materials were designed for.
6. **Illiteracy:** This is one of the challenges facing adult education in Nigeria. The rural dwellers that have the highest population of adults are mostly illiterate and do not understand easily, this makes it difficult for the personnel to teach them.
7. **Lack of political will:** Institutional

frameworks for the implementation of adult education programmes have been provided, but the will to match the declaration in the frameworks with action is lacking. This may be that our political leaders lack the understanding of the relevance of adult education to national development.

### **Conclusion**

Man needs education in order to express himself fully and reach his potential. But, the formal education system cannot provide a man with all the education he needs to realize self-fulfillment. To cater for the education aspirations of all citizens as well as their socio-economic changes or

transformation in Nigeria, adult education is an indispensable tool for the actualization of these objectives. It provides for the interest of both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the formal system. Thus, adult education plays an important role in social, economic and political development of any nation. As a result, Nigeria should intensify efforts in adult education for socio-economic transformation and environmental sustainability in order to provide citizens with opportunities to achieve self-fulfillment and full participation in society. This is because adult education is essential for human and societal survival.

### **Recommendations**

For adult education to achieve the task of socio-economic transformation, the paper therefore, recommends the followings:

1. Government should ensure adequate power supply to all nooks and crannies of the country, especially the rural areas where the country has a majority of illiterates.
2. Government should give priority to adult and non-formal education through budgetary allocation for adequate funding of adult education programmes in the country.
3. All those involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of adult education programmes should be exposed to training and retraining in ICT utilization and use for efficient services delivery.
4. Computer literacy should be rigorously funded and invested, especially, for the adults and the vulnerable groups in Nigeria. This will go a long way to help in the achievement of the SDGs when people can seek information and learn on their own, taking advantage of the world as a global village.
5. Government and NGOs should promote, make provision for and fund more online education for the adults (especially the illiterates, out of school children, the educationally disadvantaged and the vulnerable groups) to widen the range of course perspectives and skills development.
6. For beneficiaries to be able to adapt into the workforce and deal with globalization and its benefits, information and communication technology should be used in the delivery process for adult education programmes.
7. Creativity is one of the most

essential roles one needs if you must function well in adult education skills acquisition. There should be training and retraining of instructors, facilitators and tutors involved in adult education programmes so as to keep them abreast of new developments in provision and delivery of adult and non-formal education in the world.

8. If individuals and the society as a whole embrace adult education, the literacy level of the whole society will increase and therefore, more job opportunities will be created.

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