

## DEMOCRACY AND PROFESSIONALIZATION OF ADULT EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper focused on democracy and professionalization of adult education in Nigeria. It highlighted the concepts of democracy, professionalization, adult and adult education. It illustrated the outcomes of adult education, its characteristics and how adult education can be professionalized. The paper made some recommendations and concluded that democracy is a brother to professionalization and for adult education to be professionalized, there is need to ensure that clients in adult education and its programmes are fine-tuned to meet the challenging needs of Nigerian society especially in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, professionalization, adult and adult education.

### INTRODUCTION

Aristotle the great philosopher once posits that for any discussion to be intelligible, it has to begin with definition of salient concepts inherent in it. This simply suggests that this paper shall begin with the definition of the following concepts; democracy, professionalization, adult and adult education.

### DEMOCRACY

The concept of democracy has been defined by many scholars and governments in different perspectives. Hornby (1994) in Onyenemezu (2012) defines democracy as a government that allows freedom of speech, religion and political opinion, that upholds the rule of law and majority rule that respects the right of minorities.

Azikiwe (1961) conceives democracy in it's contemporary context as:

*"A government which is responsible to an electorate, whose representatives are elected on an adult suffrage through a secret ballot. Such government exercises its powers in accordance with certain fundamental rights under a regime which practices the rule of law and respects human dignity on the basis of individual freedom...in a democracy, a characteristic of political tension is the struggle for power. It usually takes shape as a series of battles between OUTF and the INF for the control of the machineries of government and the organ of the state."*

The right to elect or be elected is greatly enhanced by a political system known as democracy. Oyovbaire (1987) in Onyenemezu (2012) perceives democracy as a political framework from which public policies emerge and are administered for society. Abraham Lincoln, former American President who was reputed for putting a stop to the inhuman slave trade gave the most acceptable definition of democracy as government of the people, by the people and for the people (Raphael 1970) in Onyenemezu (2012).

Democracy is associated with openness of government actions to citizen's criticism.

For the purpose of this paper, democracy denotes an administration which is people oriented in all its ramifications. Democracy as it relates to adult education profession fails to address the professional status of adult education in Nigeria. For instance how are positions like adult education inspectors, commissioners/minister of education etc filled? Is the Nigerian government providing for the welfare aspirations and professional development of adult education adequately?

Obviously, these positions are filled through selections or appointments rather than by democratic elections.

### What Is A Profession?

Hoyle (1980) succinctly perceives a profession as an occupation which performs a crucial function; the exercise of this function requires considerable degree of skills.

Amadi (1994) sees a profession as:

*“Any prestige holding occupation that renders an essential social-service embodies a systematic body of knowledge, requires long academic and practical training, enjoys high degree autonomy and enforces condition of service, possesses a code of conduct prescribed by members and for themselves, have a representative organization as well as provision for professional development.”*

Gordon (1983) conceptualizes profession as desirable and discipline occupation with an implication for intellectual and largely mental expertise. A profession is a discipline which is based on knowledge competency and commands the intellectual capability to perform and excel in his chosen profession.

### Who Is An Adult?

The definition of who an adult is has been described to be culture referenced. This simply means there is no one generally acceptable definition to it. Different societies perceive it to mean different thing at different times. Jegede (2003) perceives an adult as a person that has attained a specific chronological age of adult hood in a particular society and who can be regarded as mature and experienced individual with the possibility of a certain level of ageing.

UNESCO (1976) in Nzeneri (2010) defines an adult as a person regarded as such by the society to which he/she belongs. Nzeneri (2010) perceives an adult as a person who is physically and psychologically mature. He went further stating that an adult is one who is socially, economically and politically responsible. However, Oduaran (1991) in Onyenemezu (2011) formulated some general criteria by which an adult can be identified as a person who must be:

- So recognized by the society to which he or she belongs;
- Physiologically mature;
- Economically independent;
- Socially responsible;
- Politically responsible; and
- A spouse, a parent or an active citizen.

### What is Adult Education?

Adult education, just like who an adult is has varied definitions from different authors and writers. UNESCO, in her international conference in Nairobi, Kenya (1976) as reported in Nzeneri (2010:10) defines adult education as:

*“The entire body of organized educational process, 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 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 and bring about changes in their attitude or behaviour in the two fold perspective of full personal development and participation inbalanced and independent, social and economic and cultural development.”*

The above definition by UNESCO is board and encompassing in the sense that it does not only define adult education but it also defines its content and scope.

Onyenemezu (2011) gave a simple definition of adult education as the education (formal, informal and non-formal) given to any person regarded as an adult by the society in order to socially, economically and culturally improve and empower him/her, so that the person will be able to contribute meaningfully as a useful and acceptable member of society. According to him adult education is the education based on the needs of the adult.

Having examined the concepts of democracy, professionalization, adult and adult education, it becomes appropriate at this stage to examine who is a professional adult educator/educationist and his roles in adult education to make this discourse more meaningful.

Bown and Tomori (1979) distinguished between an adult educator and adult educationist as the former being a practitioner while the latter as a theoretician. They went further stating that many people who theorize about an activity were once practitioners themselves. In the case of an adult educator, it becomes a different thing. This means not everyone who talks or writes about adult education is an adult education professional. Though we may have adult educationists. They are quite different from adult education experts/professionals. When we talk about adult education professionals or experts, we mean someone who practices adult education, as we have medical doctors practicing medicine, engineers, practicing engineering, teachers practicing teaching etc. Nzeneri (2010) perceives an adult education professional as a person who consciously and systematically administers the teaching/learning activities, programmes and processes of adult education with the primary aim of assisting other adults to learn (ie attain their desired goals).

In adult education, the professional/expert is referred to as the “tutor” or the “facilitator” because it has less authoritarian attachment when compared with the teacher in the formal education system. Bown (1979) in Nzeneri (2010) states that a tutor may be someone of less status than a lecturer; but in adult education the opposite should apply since the educator of adults should avoid lecturing and aim at a tutorial relationship. This is so because the effectiveness and success of any administration depends wholly on the administrator. Likewise in adult education, the adult education professional/expert serves as an administrator. Nzeneri (2010) states that adult education professional/expert must regard the administration of adult learning activities both as a science and an art. As a science, the administration of adult education must be approached systematically as an art, the process of organization and management must be practiced wisely, with regard to the importance of the learner, his behaviour and his culture”.

Okedara (1979) observes that an adult education professional/expert refers to any person who is professionally qualified to handle teaching/learning of adults. In the above definitions and explanations of adult education professional/expert, two categories abound. Those who qualify as adult educators ie the professionals and those who do not qualify as adult education professionals.

The professionals are those who are trained in the principles and practices of adult education enterprise and are qualified and competent enough to handle adult education programmes while non-professionals are those who practice adult education but are not trained, not qualified, not competent to handle adult education programmes.

Knowles (1970), Oduaran (1991) and Nzeneri (2010) categorized adult education experts or professionals in three levels.

**The firing-line level:** Adult educators/professionals here involve grassroot workers, teachers, and analysts of adult learning needs, planners of adult learners’ learning experiences, learning resource, providers and performance evaluators. They play the primary roles in adult education process.

**The programme director level:** Include those adult educators who diagnose, organize, plan, administer, train and evaluate functions.

**The professional leadership level:** Here, we have small crop of adult educators who strive relentlessly to develop new knowledge, prepare curricular materials, introduce modern techniques of doing the job, train adult educators, co-ordinate the activities of agencies with adult educational interest, contribute ideas that should guide policy formulations and lead research investigations among a host of other functions.

Okedara (1979) categorized the functions of the adult education professional/expert into two; namely

- a. Planning and administration of adult education activities; and
- b. Evaluation of progress in adult education.

Adult education professional in all its ramifications particularly with the emergence of Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) recently put in place, fits in properly as a profession. Professionalization of adult education involves the movement of the field towards desired standard of educational preparation or training and competency.

Fasokun (2006) states that the term professionalization is a direct attempt to:

- I. Use education or training to improve the quality of practice.
- II. Standardize professional response;
- III. Better define a collection of persons as representing a field of endeavours;
- IV. Enhance communication within the field.

### **Democracy and Professionalization of Adult Education**

Having examined the concepts of democracy, professionalization, adult and adult education, we can now deal with professionalization of adult education in a democratic situation or government.

Professionalization of adult education as earlier observed involves the movement of the field towards desired standards of educational preparation or training and competency (Nzeneri 2005). A professional adult educator is expected to be competent in principles (theories) and practice of adult education. Professionalization indicates attempt to train and to improve the quality of adult education practice. Fasokun (2006) observes that one of the difficulties in describing a professional adult education expert is the fact that so many people are now working with adult learners in different capacities. The field of adult education means something to everyone, a field of study, a philosophy, a way of life, a profession. This concept mean different thing to different people. Adult education is concerned not with preparing people for life, but rather with helping or assisting adults live more successfully as useful and acceptable members of their various societies and therefore contribute meaningfully to the development of those societies. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) observes that:

If there is to be an overarching function of the adult education enterprise, it is to assist adults to increase competence or negotiate transitions, in their social roles (worker, parent, retiree etc), to help them gain greater fulfilment in their personal and community problems.

The above assertion clearly describes what adult education professionals can do to people in their different societies. In Nigeria, only a few of those working in adult education programmes have received basic professional training in the field. Some have received training in other disciplines, but without specific preparation for teaching material to adults (Fasokun 2006). It is a fact that the general job instability makes it difficult for adult education professionals to upgrade their skills. This obviously has affected adult education profession.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper emphasized democracy and professionalization of adult education in Nigeria. The concepts of democracy, professionalization, adult and adult education were discussed. Finally, the writer believes that functional democracy encourages organizational/ institutional performance through professionalization. Adult education should be professionalized. For democracy to thrive, concept, principles and strategies must be learned and internalized through the professionalization of adult education, and for the adult education to become professionalized, the system (democracy) must be stable. The two concepts must be allowed to co-exist for development to flourish because they complement each other. Adult education professionals should be used in adult education programmes for them to yield expected results which should be for the betterment and development of our societies.

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