

## A REFLECTION OF ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The focus of this paper was to highlight the challenges associated with promotion of adult literacy education in Nigeria and to examine critically the modalities (structures and strategies) employed by adult literacy institutions in the management of adult literacy programmes. Since 1946, the year of first government mass literacy campaign in the country, Non-Governmental Organizations and some international partners have been playing complementary roles to governmental efforts towards promoting adult literacy education. In addition to well-structured institutional arrangements right from the Federal level to zonal education offices in the 774 local government areas, a good number of administrative strategies including the 1999-launched Universal free Basic Education Programme with its inclusive nature are on ground to reduce the high rate of adult illiteracy in the country. Upon all these, adult illiteracy continues to pose a significant problem in Nigeria. Is it to be understood that most of the institutions and personnel charged with the responsibility of planning and organizing adult literacy education lack the expertise and training on how adult literacy programmes should be handled for positive results? However, in the final analysis, some identified challenges such as poor conceptualization of adult literacy, lack of political will, inadequate funding, poor professional development, porous literacy environment, etc. which make the practitioners face a Herculean task in performing their duties, must be seriously addressed else, administration and management of adult literacy education will remain a farce in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Adult education, non-formal education, adult literacy education, administration and management.

### INTRODUCTION

Through Nigerian's participation in various international meetings and conferences where literacy is discussed as a right, the country now recognizes literacy both as a human right in itself and as a crucial instrument for the pursuit of other rights. Since about 1843 when literacy education in Nigeria was pioneered by Muslim and Christian missionaries, the country has left no stone on turned in her efforts to make her citizens literate. Following Nigeria's independence in 1960 literacy efforts in the country received a boost when UNESCO supported the establishment of an Adult literacy Institute in Nigeria, specifically in Ibadan in 1965. In 1971 the Nigeria National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) was set up; as a voluntary organization charged with the primary role of promoting adult literacy education. A great wind of change came in 1990 when the Federal military government established the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education which is responsible for the organization, monitoring and assessment of adult literacy practices in the country. For comprehensive coverage, the Commission had to spread its dragnet of activities nation-wide with offices in the six geo-political zones of the country, the 36 states and all the 774 local government areas. Furthermore, co-ordination and supervision of literacy classes at the grass root level are undertaken by the local adult education officers,

supervisors and literacy instructors. In addition to above institutional and structural arrangements, government's efforts are complemented by Non-governmental organizations including some international partners all of which constitute stakeholders in the management of one form of adult literacy education or the other.

Yet, illiteracy continues to be a significant problem in Nigeria, up to the point of the country belonging to the E-9 countries which account for 75% of the world's over one billion illiterates. Specifically, according to the 2008 Global Monitoring Report, the most recent data for Nigeria shows an adult literacy rate of 69% (78% for men and 60 for women) or an adult illiteracy rate of 31%. In fairness, one is constrained to posit that the literacy efforts attempted in Nigeria so far have not produced the desired results and millions of people are still being denied access to literacy because of lack of effective education policies

Consequently, the main focus of this paper was to examine how adult literacy institutions manage adult literacy programmes in terms of planning, organizing and controlling functions in order to achieve predetermined objectives of eradicating illiteracy in Nigeria. It will, however, be necessary to conceptualize some operational terms in the study which include: adult education, non-formal education, adult literacy education, administration and management.

## **ADULT EDUCATION**

Adult education is a comprehensive term for all forms of learning programmes in which adults participate in order to develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge and improve their technical or professional qualifications to enable them meet their needs and those of their societies (Ihejirika, 2011). It is a transmission process of general technical or vocational knowledge, as well as acquisition of skills, values and attitudes, which takes place in or out of the formal education system with the view to catering for early education deficiencies of mature people and enhancing their self fulfillment and active participation in the social, economic and political life of the society.

In the same vein, Liveright and Haygood, (1969:9) defined adult education as a process whereby persons who no longer attend school on a regular and full-time basis (unless full-time programmes are especially designed for adults) undertake sequential and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, understanding or skills, appreciation and attitudes, or for the purpose of identifying and solving personal or community problems.

## **NON-FORMAL EDUCATION**

Non-Formal Education is any form of organized educational activity for youths, children and adults who cannot be integrated into the formal school system as a result of some socially, economically and politically imposed conditions (Imhabekhai, 2009) It involves out-of-school education for illiterate members of the society, unemployed youths, civic education for men and women to enable them play the various roles assigned to them by their society. According to Okedara and Bown (1981) "the rubric of non-formal education covers training and instructions and ranges from individualized apprenticeship to nation-wide literacy. It may be vocational such as staff training centers in Nigeria designed to provide employment opportunities to young school leavers and for other employed persons or girls' vocational centers established in many African countries which train girls in vocational skills and prepare young women for marriages and business". It may be political and social education, such as that carried on in citizenship and training centers (e.g the Nigerian centers in Plateau, Lagos, and Rivers States). Thus defined, non-formal education includes, for example,

agricultural extension and farm training programmes, adult literacy programmes, occupational skill training given outside the formal system, youth clubs with substantial education purposes, and various community programmes of instruction in health, nutrition, family planning, co-operatives, and the likes (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974:8).

### **ADULT LITERACY (BASIC) EDUCATION**

Adult literacy or adult basic education refers to the teaching of adults according to any organized formal or non-formal plans of education with the ultimate goal of helping them better their occupational opportunities and quality of life (Nji, 2000). Here, “basic” means the very early stages of a process, which ought to continue and grow. Adult literacy/basic education is therefore, the foundation of lifelong learning and skills acquisition which people ought to continue for the rest of their lifetime. As stated by Haladu (2008), for adults to improve the quality of their lives, they need not only essential learning tools of literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving, but also basic learning content such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, all of which are required by human beings to be able to survive, develop their full capacities, live and work with dignity, participate fully in development, make informed decisions, and continue learning (Adult Education and Development, 2000). In simple parlance, therefore, adult literacy education is the education designed for mature persons who missed the opportunity of acquiring formal education at an earlier age and who are not discouraged by that circumstance but still desire to remedy it beginning with basic literacy skills.

### **ADMINISTRATION**

Administration is a social process concerned with identifying, maintaining, motivating, controlling and unifying formally and informally organized human and material resources within an integrated system designed specifically to achieve predetermined objectives (Musaazi 1982). Similarly, perceived as the activities of groups cooperating to accomplish common goals, Okoli and Onah (2002) asserted that administration is a process common to all group effort, public or private, civil or military, large-scale or small-scale, and since administration is conceived within patterns of cooperative behaviour, any person engaged in an activity in cooperation with other persons for achievement of a common goal is engaged in administration. Administration of adult literacy education therefore, refers to the cooperative activities of adult educators, be them professionals, directors and volunteers, no matter the levels of their functionality, in making sure the organization, planning and implementation of adult literacy programmes are effectively carried on with positive results.

### **MANAGEMENT**

Many scholars use the terms management and administration interchangeably. Nwachukwu (1988), Hill and Mcshane (2008) posited management as the art or act of getting things done through people in organizations and that managers perform their functions through the processes of planning, organizing, directing, reporting, staffing, co-coordinating, budgeting and leadership in order to attain organizational objectives. The above functions characterize all modern organizations including adult literacy institutions. In management, policy objectives must be well spelt out first before management functions as listed above are carried out, In the case of adult literacy education in Nigeria, the National Commission for Mass literacy, Adult and Non- formal education dishes out policy objectives to guide application of management functions by institutions for achievement of programme objectives.

## MANAGEMENT OF ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

Prior to the formal establishment of structures like the National Mass Education Commission in 1991 by Decree 17 of 1990 and inaugurated on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1991, the National Policy on Education (1977) had reaffirmed the commitment of the Federal Government to the promotion of adult and non-formal education. This was demonstrated in the establishment of Divisions of adult and non-formal education in the Federal Ministry of Education and State Education Ministries to provide guidelines for the organization of adult education programmes.

Adult literacy institutions consist of all the organizations which offer various forms of adult literacy programmes such as: traditional literacy, basic literacy, functional literacy, information communication literacy, vocational literacy, environmental literacy and tourism literacy (Obal, 2010 in Arikpo 2012). All these forms of literacy programmes and others are being managed either in homes, governmental, non-governmental and some international partners through various structures and strategies.

The importance of institutions and structures in management of adult literacy education informed Omolewa (1985:98) who pointed out that:

The twin issues of institutions and structures are most crucial to the effective delivery of adult education services in any country. This is because of the nature and target of adult education work covering a variety of clientele from the grass root level to the most sophisticated elite. Thus the rural dwellers and farmers are as important as the urban dwellers and top managers in planning and execution of adult education work.

In homes, literate parents, may bring together the entire members of their family and teach them literacy skills. It could, in fact, be of the children who are literate enough to teach other members of the family informally and sometimes non-formally.

At the higher institutions which include Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and others, through their Departments of Adult and Non-Formal Education, Community Development, Extension or Extra-Mural Education, manage adult literacy programmes by engaging in promotion and training of personnel for the execution of literacy education. Many scholars such as Omolewa (1991), Adeola (1993) and Arikpo, Taiwo and Ojuah (2007) have exhaustively discussed the efforts of universities in the promotion of literacy education in Nigeria. The easily identifiable contributions of universities to literacy education include consultancy, faculty members' community service, seminars, materials development, research, and more importantly, community-based experimental literacy projects. In like manner, the development of middle-level and high-level manpower, which are mostly needed both at the grass root and top management levels have continued to receive the attention of these institutions (Aderinoye (2004).

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), according to Oduaran (1989) in Arikpo (2007) have been the primary initiators and sponsors of Adult Literacy Programmes. In Nigeria at present, the various NGOs have united under the name of National Organizations of Literacy Support Services (NOGALSS). They are used to complement government efforts in promotion of adult literacy education. Some of the activities embarked upon by these organizations include mobilization, establishment of literacy classes, provision of relevant data to local and state agencies as well as the National Commission through their national forum. The list of NGOs in the business of adult literacy education in Nigeria is endless but suffices it to mention the Baptist Convention, Rotary and Lion Clubs, Association for

Reproductive and Family Health (ARFH), the Federation of Muslim Women Association (FOMWA), and the University Village Association (UNIVA) which emerged in 1997 as the best NGO in Nigeria in literacy promotion activities.

Other institutions championing the course of adult literacy education in Nigeria are International partners such as UNESCO, UNDP, HZ/DVV (a German-based NGO), CONCERN UNIVERSAL etc. UNESCO, for instance has always been interested in the promotion of Mass Literacy Programme UNDP's intervention between 1995-2000 is fresh to be forgotten. However, people hardly invest where they will not maximize profit. This is why the actions of non-governmental/voluntary agencies have not made outstanding impact on adult education development in Nigeria.

### **STRUCTURES FOR EXECUTION OF ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA**

Structures abound in the country for execution of adult literacy programmes. What is needed is for all stakeholders to use the framework and objectives of the institutions appropriately. Some outstanding ones are discussed hereunder:

#### **The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NCMANE)**

This apex institution was established by Decree 17 of 1990 and was inaugurated on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1991. The National Commission works with all establishments concerned with literacy education in Nigeria and all over the world such as State agencies, adult education departments in tertiary institutions, international organizations like UNICEF, the British Council, UNDP, Women Education Agencies, etc. The Commission which is headed by an executive secretary has the main function of policy formulation, monitoring, funding, evaluation and cooperation on all matters relating to mass literacy. Government funds for adult literacy education are released to the national commission which in turn disburses such fund to state agencies which control local government education offices concerned with adult literacy education.

#### **State Agencies for Adult and Non-Formal Education**

The year 1987 marked a milestone, when the Federal Government directed that all states of the Federal should establish adult and non-formal education agencies to execute literacy education in the country. This was a bold step to deal drastically with the high rate of adult illiteracy in the country. The state agencies took over the management of adult education which was hitherto handled in a section of Ministry of Education with non-professionals as directors. Today state agencies are responsible for the execution of policies arrived at by the National Commission on literacy programmes in their various areas of authority. They monitor, supervise, co-ordinate, and evaluate all the activities of the local adult education agencies within their domains. According to Aderinoye (2004), despite the establishment of these agencies in all the states and the Federal Capital Territory – Abuja, the usual problems of inadequate funding, poor co-ordination and lack of effective implementation strategies have continued to persist and so the problem of high adult literacy in the country remains unsolved. At a meeting of stakeholders held at Sharon Ultimate Hotel, Abuja on March 11, 2010, it was reported that most state governments are not giving adequate attention to adult literacy education and that State Agencies Boards are all weak or are non-existence thereby denying agencies of the political will needed to motivate the personnel to action.

### **Local Government Agency Offices**

These are Extensions of State Agencies in the 774 local government councils in the country. They are responsible for mobilizing learners for the literacy centres, establishment of learning centres/classes, recruitment of instructors, provision of learning materials on behalf of state agencies, supervision of the centres, monitoring of literacy classes, keeping of records and evaluation of literacy programmes in the local governments. The administration of adult literacy programme at this level is vested in the hand of the adult education officer and his team who recruit primary school teachers as part-time instructors. These unqualified and untrained instructors have the tendency to teach adult learners with pedagogical methods meant for children in the primary school hence there is high attrition rate in the rural areas.

### **STRATEGIES APPLIED IN PROMOTING LITERACY EDUCATION**

Since the 1940s, a good number of strategies have been put in force to enable the country reduce the shameful level of adult illiteracy in her geometrically growing population. Such strategies include.

#### **Conferences and workshops**

The use of conferences as strategies in the administration of adult and non-formal education in Nigeria dates back to a period before the Nigerian civil war, precisely in April 1966 at University of Nigeria, Nsukka where an Association known as Adult Education Students Association was constituted into an interim committee charged with the responsibility of preparing for launching of a national body and a constitution to be examined in a conference proposed to hold at University of Ibadan in December 1967 (Aderinoye, 2004) This interim committee later in 1971 metamorphosed into the Nigerian National council for adult education (NNCAE); a voluntary organization changed with the primary role of promoting adult literacy education in Nigeria. It has since done well in planning and conducting adult education conferences/seminars and workshop periodically but failed to reduce adult illiteracy to a tolerable level. Unfortunately till today, most national conferences and workshops are held in cities and higher institutions where the target group – the illiterate adults, have no idea of what is happening, because they are held outside the interior areas where majority of the illiterate, jobless and despondent adults reside. Instead, such strategies as conferences and workshops benefit those who are already reasonably literate.

#### **The Mass Media**

The role of the press in dissemination of information generally and adult literacy education programmes in particular cannot be overemphasized. For instance, the television serves as a wonderful strategy for it is used to feature programmes aimed at educating men, women, youth and children in domestic services whereas agricultural extension workers use it to educate millions of people on agricultural production. On health, it is used to educate the public on the dangers of HIV/AIDS and other killer diseases and on the implications of refuse dump near residential homes, etc. The radio, though ephemeral, covers wide areas in its educational broadcasting to people while the print media, as numerous as they are in Nigeria, continue to educate, inform and enlighten the public on latest events in both within and outside the country. However, the television is assessed as having more impact on urban dwellers where there is electricity supply than in the poverty-stricken rural communities where only few families can afford the cost of television set and private generator to power such equipment.

### **The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme as a Strategy**

It could rightly be said that the UBE programme which was launched in 1999 is a strong weapon in the hands of the Federal government to drastically reduce the level of adult illiteracy as well as cut illiteracy generally from the root. This can be achieved if school attendance is made compulsory and the non-formal component of the programme is given the attention it deserves. This implies that parental literacy education should be pursued vigorously because according to Blau (1980:248), “so long as parents are illiterate, it is difficult to secure attendance of children in school and even more difficult to keep them there for six years or longer”. According to Maduewesi (2005), the prospect of the UBE programme is enormous as it cuts across different people and groups. With the all inclusive nature of the UBE, it has the conducive set up to achieve the desired scientific literacy for all in this 21<sup>st</sup> century since nobody is/will be left out (Maduewesi 2005).

### **The “Each-One Teach-One or Fund the Teaching of One” Strategy**

It is quite sad to note however, that this strategy has not yielded positive and encouraging acceptance throughout the federation. There is no record of its success anywhere. The issue is that enough awareness has not been created for people to know what their responsibilities are for the approach to work. In the words of Aderinoye (2004), it has been more of theory than practice.

### **CHALLENGES IN MANAGING ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA**

Like all other disciplines, adult literacy education has its own problems some of which, according to Olajide, Okemakinde and Okemakinde (2008) are products of the instability in the National Educational system and the inability of the conventional higher institutions to fund these programmes. Some of these challenges are hereunder highlighted:

The first and the major problem is the conceptualization of adult literacy education and its various forms and scopes, because it has not been given an agreeable definition by practitioners of adult education. It is therefore, difficult for many people to differentiate adult education from non-formal education or other forms of adult education programmes. Continuing, Olajide, Okemakinde and Okemakinde (2008) postulated that some still find it difficult to agree that literacy is not adult education, but an aspect of it. This lack of comprehension has led to indecisive policies on the structure and management of adult literacy education.

In a similar vein, it is an irony that, although there are numerous government and non-governmental agencies involved in the management of adult literacy programmes in Nigeria, yet the environment remains porous (Arikpo, 2012). According to Dill (1976) in Arikpo (2012), for an organization to survive, it must be able to adapt to its changing environment. To him, it is surprising to note that, the very concept people held about the scope and objectives of adult education over two centuries ago, are still being used in managing the programmes. For instance, adult education programmes are plagued with lack of structural clarity; hence, Adiele (2006), reported that, it has been much more difficult streamlining the learning needs of various categories of illiterate population, much less an assessment of future needs and how best to meet them.

In adult literacy education, the activities are seen as ad hoc projects and programmes without long-term implications. Corroborating this view, Tugbiyele (1971) submitted that out-of-school education which includes adult literacy is a neglected aspect of education which is often looked down upon and when given, it is done on an ad hoc basis. To this end, Adiele (2006) observed that most adult learning centres are cited in public schools with little or no

comfort. It is a truism that this kind of management approach is not consistent with Biao and Taiwo's (2007:5) list of factors necessary for effective adult teaching and learning, "such as: suitable meeting places, suitable furniture, suitable amount of light and suitable adult learners' facilities, etc". The absence of these makes administration of adult literacy programmes difficult.

In addition to the above is the lack of political will on the part of governments at Federal, State and local governments. This is particularly true if one considers that it was the lack of political will of government administration which made UNDP support for literacy in Nigeria between 1995 and 2000 ineffective. There is also political instability – situations where a succeeding government withdraws all support and suspends all adult education programmes put in place by its predecessor is appalling. A good example was the defunct Open University established by the former President Alhaji Shehu Shagari regime between 1980 and 1982 but suspended by the then military government of Muhammed Buhari in 1984. However, the erstwhile Open University has been reopened by the former Obasanjo administration as the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

We cannot be done with obstacles or challenges to administration of adult literacy education without hammering on the poor funding through budgetary allocations of the governments. Nigeria's allocation to education generally when compared with other African countries has not exceeded 6% out of the 26% of the national budgeted as recommended by UNESCO. If this is the case with funding education generally in Nigeria, the adult and non-formal education sub-sector only receives an insignificant attention in terms of funding. The lack of consistent and adequate funding, vision, strategy and coordination has meant that literacy services have tended to "fall through the cracks".

## CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed extensively the concepts of administration and management as practiced by institutions responsible for promotion of adult literacy education in Nigeria. Structures necessary for the practice of adult literacy education in Nigeria, to my mind, have been fully established. However, there are challenges along the line which require concerted efforts of government to get rid of them. The adult literacy education agencies, along with several national and international NGOs, create real opportunities for employment, research and enhanced educational access for all Nigerians now than in the past. What is needed is for all stakeholders to use the framework and objectives of these structures appropriately with unrelenting efforts to reduce the shameful level of adult illiteracy rate in the country which is currently put at 31% or over 22 million adult illiterates.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations can help to improve the administration and management of adult literacy education in Nigeria.

1. Illiteracy in this country is no longer an isolated phenomena. Since the issue of poor funding of adult and non-formal education has remained a recurring decimal, a low cost-effective approach is implicated. In this vein, to ensure that illiterate citizens are not deprived of their rights in the society, the new policy of "each one teach one" or "fund the teaching of one" which has been adopted by the Federal government as the inevitable strategy for the attainment of literate Nigerian society must be carried on with the vigour it requires.
2. The current UBE programme is commended for its inclusiveness, but it is not very favourable for functional literacy. If the curriculum for the primary, junior and



secondary and tertiary institutions should provide for entrepreneurship as compulsory, it will produce a wonderful result.

3. The Federal and State Governments should improve the quality of service of their radio and television stations as strategies for implementing literacy education. Functional literacy programmes should be built into the radio and television programmes preferably from 7.p.m when people should be at home to listen to and watch the programmes.
4. Professional training for adult literacy administrators, including instructors is imperative to enable them carry on their functions with expertise, high sense of responsibility and seriousness.
5. Professional adult education personnel should be employed/deployed to all the formations of National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education in the states. This will enhance professional reorientation of activities and programmes of State Agencies through effective needs assessment and mobilization of all stakeholders in the teaching and training of adults in Nigeria.
6. Nigeria has continued to operate within a narrow definition of literacy which sees it merely as the ability to read, write and calculate. This is no longer adequate for people to operate successfully in a scientific and technological age. Literacy is not just about adapting to existing conditions but about having the problem-solving and critical-thinking skills necessary to bring about any changes needed. Therefore, Nigeria needs to determine what constitutes literacy in the light of her present situation and in relation to the wider society in which Nigerians have to operate.
7. Since funding is the greatest challenge facing adult literacy education, there is a real need for the government to consult widely and come up with a reliable and workable funding mechanism. State and local governments need to take greater responsibility and treat adult education with the seriousness it deserves.
8. It is necessary that professional bodies like the Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE), Non-Governmental Association on Literacy Support Services (NOGALSS), the organized private sector and related partners should re-examine their roles, re-strategize their structures and energy, and unite to complement the efforts of Nigerian governments to give adult illiteracy a running battle it deserves.

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