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# ADULT NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

ESSAYS IN MEMORY  
OF  
PROFESSOR AYO OGUNSEYE

Edited by  
J. T. Okedara  
C. Nnorom Anyanwu  
M. A. Lanre Omole

# **Rethinking Adult and Non-Formal Education**

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***A book of Readings in Memory  
of Professor Ayo Ogunseye***

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*Edited by*

**J. T. Okedara  
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## The Social Context of Adult Education and Development

J.O. Ojesina, Funmi Folaranmi  
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### Introduction

As the discipline of adult education gradually emerges for the generic field of education, the need for greater lucidity in the terminologies being coined or adopted for expressing ideas in the new field is becoming more urgent (Wilson, 1969 and Anowor, 1987). As Akinpelu (1981) states:

*The purpose of this is to establish important criteria of usage which will thus facilitate communication and intercourse among practitioners and researchers. In other words, the philosopher of adult education is likely to busy himself with probing what concepts are in common use on adult education, with setting out the many varieties of meanings, and with making people conscious that the words they use have consequences beyond the mere utterance*

The term 'adult' in adult education is an operative word. It is what distinguishes adult education from the mainstream of educational activities. It is meant to tell us what kind of education is under consideration. In philosophical terms, it indicates the species whereas education signifies the genus.

However, most educationists will perhaps agree that in relation to a generic concept of education, the term 'adult' plays a specifying role. But education is not universally understood as a generic term in the first place. There are some who equate education with one out of the many kinds of education. For instance, some people regard schooling in the

mistaken – “that if we simply pour enough knowledge into people, they will turn out to be good people and they will know how to make use of their knowledge”. In recent times, however, the identification of the concept of life-long learning as the organising principle of all education has further clarified the concept of education as a generic term (Knowles, 1970, Wilson, 1969 and Akinpelu, 1981). As Knowles (1970) has pointed out:

*“The basic promise underlying this line of thought is that in a world of accelerating change must be a life-long process. Therefore schooling must be concerned primarily with developing the skills of enquiry and adult education must be primarily concerned with providing the resources and support for self-directed enquirer’s.”*

Yet, despite this clarification of the plurality of educational functions, and the recognition that adult education has a special function within the larger context of life-long education, some controversy has continued as to what is “adult” in adult education. A major aspect of this persistent controversy concerns the status of ‘adulthood’ of the clientele in relation to the subject matter of adult education and its aims and methodology (Anowor, 1987).

Education is said to contain individual and aggregate utilities. At the individual level, knowledge acquired through the educational process may be useful only to the individual in a personal sense, for example, learning how to drive one’s car, or simply how to use an instrument. On the other hand, the aggregate utilities come in when such acquired knowledge is directly related to the process of economic growth and development. This is termed ‘development knowledge’ and can be imparted or acquired through a process of ‘developmental education and non-developmental’, education which may not be easy to make (Wharton, 1965).

Thus, Matanmi (1987) states that, the process of educating the rural worker in Nigeria is a very involved one. According to him, in view of the predominantly agricultural (or farm) orientation of the rural communities, such education should be targetted primarily to the farmers, i.e. persons who cultivate the land to grow crops, including labourers and unpaid family workers. It is necessary that both the basic form of education, i.e. literacy, and the more rationalised developmental education, be applied.



## **What is Adult Education?**

The term 'adult education' means many things in different contexts and different periods. Adult education today is not the same as in earlier years; and the words as used in Third World countries do not mean the same thing as they do in the West. UNESCO noted: "in essence, adult education is closely related to the social, political and cultural condition of each country that no uniform or precise definition can be arrived at". Even within one country, different writers can use the term to mean different things (Lowe, 1975).

For inherent within the concept of adult education are many ambiguities. In order to grapple with these, a number of different titles have been coined ñ continuing education, Recurrent Education, Lifelong Education, the French term education permanente, non-Formal Education and so on. These differences, adding richness to the concept, do not perhaps matter too much, except that some persons approaching adult education for the first time find it all very confusing (Rogers, 1992).

### **Thus Rogers (1992) defines Adult Education as follows:**

All planned and purposeful learning opportunities offered to those who are recognised and who recognise themselves as adults in their own society and who have left the formal initial educational system (or who have passed beyond the possible stage of initial education if they were never in it), whether such learning opportunities are inside or outside the formal system, as long as such learning opportunities treat the learners as adults in decision-making, use appropriate adult leaning methodologies and styles and purposes and to meet their own needs.

Rogers stresses the point that, such learning opportunities will include a wide spectrum of activities - vocational programmes, careers and professional development, leisure and hobby pursuits, personal and social growth programmes, specific training and general interest courses. The range of such learning opportunities will vary greatly from country to country and from period to period. However, adult education in Third World countries thus covers not just literacy compaigns but also community and environmental health education, nutrition, income-generating programmes, agricultural extension, women's programmes, social forestry, vocational

skill training in short, any form of education and training for adults; and in the West, it covers all that normally goes under the title of adult education, adult training, continuing education, both inside and outside the formal educational system. In essence, adult education cannot be restricted to any one kind of adult learning programme; it comprises all efforts to offer to adults the systematic learning experiences which they need to cope with their current and changing 'life-site'.

As aforementioned, adult education is an amorphous concept which covers a wide range of activities. According to Anyanwu (1987) several definitions of adult education have been attempted, all aiming at portraying its importance for the development of the individual and his community. Adult education is directed to the people and its major focus is the local community. Its primary goal is to organise for the solution of their group problems. Adult education is therefore a major factor in the improvement of personal, social and economic life.

## **Development and Adult Education**

Thinking about adult education in the West, one can say over the last 150 years, it has undergone significant changes, and many different positions have been adopted. Two main strands have persisted throughout this period, the liberal education view and the social change view. They have existed along side each other, each interrelating with and borrowing from the other (Thompson, 1971).

Education in general, and adult education in particular, are seen in much of the Third World to serve another purpose. Whether narrowly conceived as adult literacy (functional or not), the extension of elementary schooling to the masses, or whether more widely as incorporating extension and post-literacy educational programmes, adult education is based on nationally identified needs rather than on individual wants. Attendance at educational programmes is not a voluntary option but a social responsibility. The assumption is that we cannot rely upon the people to take initiative in their education, persuasion needs to be employed. The education of children, adolescent and adults alike is for social goals. The role of the adult educator is not so much to increase choice as to encourage responsible social behaviour. Adult education in the Third World is for mass education, not for the few (Thompson, 1971 and Rogers, 1992).

They, however, opined that at the heart of all programmes of adult education in the West lie the concept of development. For development is not a thing which the countries of the Third World alone need; the West needs it just as much. A little thought will convince us that even in the richest of countries, there are regions which are marginalised and underdeveloped, and sectors of society which are disadvantaged. And in the application of the concepts of development to the West, we have much to learn from the insights and experiences of the Third World. Nevertheless, if we are to apply these concepts to adult education in the West, we need to see what Development is and what it is not. Just as Development should lie at the heart of all programmes of adult education, so at the heart of every true Development programme there lies a process of educating and training of adults.

Parkkyn (1973), Lengrand (1975) and Cropley (1981) see Education as a change-agent of providing the new knowledge and skills and understandings, which our development programmes need for social change. They also see that education for development is a matter for the individual, even if the goals are national goals. For although group affiliations assist in the formation and strengthening of new attitudes, nevertheless attitude change is an individual learning process; and the development of confidence and of motivation will if so directed, lead to both greater social responsibility and to personal growth. They further argue that, adult education in the West is for development, and in the less industrialised (largely rural), technologically less advanced, poorer and mainly black countries (the so called "third World") where adult education has often been seen as secondary to the national concern for development, to be done later 'when we can afford it' a proper definition of development will call for putting the "Education and Training of Adults" (ETA) at the heart of the Development process itself.

However, without a full process of ETA, there can be no true development, without a properly understood concept of development, adult education will continue to be marginalised; and this equation applies equally to all parts of this one world which we jointly inhabit.

## **Adult Education and Social Welfare**

Prior to the years of active thought and social planning which gave rise to the welfare state, generally between 1941 to 1948, the dominant ideology was expressed by the term *laissez faire*.

This conferred only a minor role to the state, through central and local government, to provide for the welfare of the people. The belief was that free economic markets, unrestrained by government and working by an invisible process of mutual self interest and self-regulation would provide for all through the production of surplus wealth. Those unable to share in the production of wealth, through their own enterprise and labour, could at least benefit in part through the caring concerns of philanthropic charity. The term 'benefit' is open to question from a modern day perspective for the receipt of charity was often based on harsh rules of eligibility. Indeed the climate of public opinion was decidedly unfavourable towards the poor and they were held responsible for their own condition. The relief of poverty as determined by the 1834 Poor Law Act was based on the principle of 'less eligibility', which amounted to treating the poor as social deviants. Notions such as unrestricted economic markets, poverty as deviance and self-help were supported by the theories of classical economists who held that the 'iron law of wages', which was in effect subsistence pay for arduous toil, was necessary as a check against a population boom, the risk of famine and a drain on the productive capacity of the nation.

The roles of adult education in the context of these events and beliefs were of several varieties. On the one hand the pursuit of education for salvation through adult literacy suggests an altruism and practical form of compassionate welfare. At the same time education for vocation could be seen as playing into the hands of the interest of capitalists. Similarly, the emphasis on self help as an underpinning theme of adult education could be interpreted as a form of social control through its influence on thinking and behaviour amongst serious minded people seeking education for various purposes. In these ways, adult education can be seen to be reflecting some of the currents of thought and action both in the context of the development of social welfare and political ideas.

Pressures for social reform and modification of the dominant political ideology and its hold over welfare came from several sources as the foundations of an industrial society took on an more definite structures. The development of a utilitarian outlook expressed in terms of 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' fostered a more benign philanthropy concerned with human needs in a more compassionate way. It, also to some extent, influenced the

early notions of collectivist minded socialist welfare, as a counter veiling force to the idea of the survival of the economically and socially fittest. The emerging middle classes with embryonic ideas of service to the community, rational administration through legislation and social planning, and protective self-interest influenced the development of public health services, the extension of the franchise and a national system of education. In the health field it was recognised that disease knew no social boundary and preventive measures were vital. Moreover education was seen as necessary to head off a fear of class revolution. Foreign economic competition created a need for a more literate workforce in an increasingly complex division of labour which was subject to the application of technological invention to the productive process. During this long period of industrial development, the representation of labour, through the formation of trade unions and working class political parties, exerted some influence over welfare and educational matters as well as the traditional concerns of pay and work conditions. During these movements of ideas and the setting up of an emerging system of social self are adult education was busy with the practical tasks of providing basic literacy, technical knowledge and cultural literacy, albeit for a small and elite sector of the adult population.

The view being expressed here is that adult education can be seen as part of a developing system of social welfare permeating the economic, political and cultural spheres of society throughout the last two centuries. Unlike other welfare services, adult education was never incorporated into the activities of the state through legislation until the 1944 Education Act. Thus for much of its history, adult education operated within the voluntary sector of welfare education operated within the voluntary sector of welfare provision, acting as an unofficial and unacknowledged means of enhancing some sense of individual well-being and a collective awareness of social needs whether related.

This view begs the need for some definitions of welfare for it has been used in two main ways. The first idea is that of social well-being. In this approach, adult education provides a service related to people's needs for intellectual stimulus, knowledge and skills in a wide variety of life situations, where some kind of organised learning is useful or necessary. Education in this sense contributes towards the quality of life by affording its users an opportunity to develop themselves as

individuals. Knowledge skills are only part of the product of adult education learning which also appears to enhance self-confidence, personal esteem and social belonging. Social well-being therefore is a personalised term for welfare arising, in this case, from the beneficial effects of adult education extending the cultural and recreational facilities. By such individual needs, collectively expressed, the well-being of society is extended, on the understanding that what is being demanded and provided meets with general social approval.

The notion of welfare, then emphasised individual well-being. It is best understood as an individually perceived and experienced state of mind referring to some qualitative aspect of life arising through personal services such as adult education, or, just as appropriately, health care, leisure and recreation activities. Social well-being on the idea of meeting self determined needs. It also embraces the part played by experts in personal services, such as adult education, in making intelligent provision for needs which help to make people feel good about themselves, involved and stimulated by the world around them.

The section sets out the connections between adult education for the disadvantaged, models of social welfare and the different perspectives within adult education that offer varied interpretations on the nature of such work. In making these connections, reference is made to several relevant concepts, particularly of poverty, for it forms the basis of related terms such as deprivation and disadvantage.

A useful starting point for bringing the elements of this chapter together is the significant impact of the Rusell which led to the important publication on the 'Disadvantaged Adult'. Two lines of thought were behind the Russel Report recommendation that adult education should extend its range of activities to include the disadvantaged and thereby secure a partnership with social welfare services. The first reaffirmed the belief that adult education should have a commitment towards adults, who for various reasons, deriving from their physical, educational, economic and social circumstances, could not fully participate in the existing range of learning opportunities. This is the social relevance theme reaffirmed and updated.

The second line of thought and closely related to the first is that one explanation for the marginality of adult education is its limited appeal to a narrow section of the population.

Adult education in this view simply reinforced educational benefits already experienced by the middle classes. In performing this reinforcing function, adult education had confined itself to the recreational and high-minded cultural activities of an unrepresentative social group. This had rendered adult education peripheral to the needs of the wider community and had caused the service to lose its own way in relation to its longstanding concern for social relevance and betterment. The curriculum, teaching methods and its organisation in general had made adult education a marginal service in relation to a changing society whose social and economic problems were giving rise to renewed searches for solutions. Adult education for the disadvantaged with an emphasis on reaching out into the community was seen as a relevant strategy for the future of the service.

### **Social Relevance and Problem of Non-participation'**

The desire to learn usually springs from a feeling of inadequacy, and to fill a gap between where one now is and where one would like to be. This explains why most adult learners opt voluntarily to attend classes. They realise that in the pursuit of knowledge they will increase their ability to face successfully the hazards of the problems of their changing society. These problems may be social, political, economic, moral or intellectual. It is adult education which makes possible a successful harnessing of human potential for social development. Hence, adult learners cling to it to improve their power of participation in decision-making and to enrich their community living (Anyanwu, 1981).

Although the theme of social commitment is prominent in both concept of adult education and community development, yet the direct emphasis of adult education has been on developing the capacity of individuals rather than working with groups to solve collective problems. Brumer (1959), therefore considers adult education as a study and other activities which are undertaken voluntarily by mature people without direct regard to functional value. These activities to him are concerned with development of personal abilities and the encouragement of social, moral and intellectual responsibility in relation to local, national and worldwide citizenship.

Nowadays, it is held to be insufficient to teach illiterates only the mechanics of reading and writing, instead the aim from the beginning is to relate the learning of these skills to the circumstances in which they live, increasing both the practical skills and their social knowledge in the process. The kind of learning is called fundamental education, since it attempts from the first steps to increase the illiterate's power to change his life for the better.

Social and political adult education means the provision of learning opportunities which result in an improved understanding of political processes, a political doctrine or of social changes which seem desirable. Where the state is the provider, the aim of this education is to secure a greater degree of informed participation in politics. Thus political education may also mean training for activists in particular parties (Sakharov, 1972).

However, in developing countries, one of the most important uses of adult education is in what is called nation building. The term means particularly the process by which an attempt is made to make a coherent nation out of the members of diverse tribes and linguistic groups, in order that an effective nation state may exist. It also involves education for social and economic development of a kind which will cause citizens to approve, and therefore identify themselves with, the general aims of the state.

Lovett (1975) stresses the point that, social and political activism in Britain, adult education has recently acquired a flavour which suggests that the influence of Freire, Illich and others of their ways of thinking are having an effect. The new line lays emphasis on the function of adult education as a means of improving the condition of life of deprived members of society; especially of those who live in depressed urban areas, marked by poverty and squalor, who are ignorant of the ways in which evils from which they suffer might be eliminated or relieved. Lovett, however, holds that adult education should aim at removing this ignorance, and thus enable local people to take action to improve their conditions of living.

Thus, it should be said that adult education in Britain and other parts of the world, in its richly varied forms, has made a great contribution to the development of social democracy in the sense that it has provided opportunities for learning which have enabled people to get greater advancement possible, to enable students to become effective in a number of important



social roles, and to help specialist to update their knowledge (Noelle, 1931 and Roar, 1962).

Education is the industry that produces manpower for the economy of nations, there is therefore no doubt that education contributes immensely to economic growth. In his celebrated book, *the Wealth of Nations*, Smith (1937) recognises the fact that all the acquired and useful abilities of people are a part of capital. It is partly for this reason that many governments invest heavily in education; even non-governmental establishments spend a lot of money on sponsorship of people who would return to work for them on the completion of their trainings. Many more organisation invest in executive development and on-the-job training programmes because they recognise human knowledge and ability as capital.

Oyedeji (1979) opines that, many of the benefits of education are non-economic, even these non-economic benefits may themselves have economic implications. For example, education contributes to social cohesiveness and gives psychic satisfaction to most of its recipients. Education, especially adult education teaches patriotism, religion, concepts of democracy and social justice. All these benefit create the right atmosphere for positive economic activities which contribute to a nation building.

Thus economic adult education is that type which is intended to make people more efficient or better qualified for their work, and therefore at securing a higher level of production. It may be provided at all levels from elementary to the advanced. An example is Agricultural or co-operative extension, through which, in number of ways such as the teaching of groups, demonstrations, and advising individual farmers, better method of production are taught and new crops and types of husbandry introduced. In a related field is community development, which produces schemes for local improvements, including many economic importance. Adult education is related to industrial training, which consists of elementary courses for new operatives or, at the other extreme, the preparation of skilled workers to use new technological methods. At more advanced level are courses for managerial workers and post experience courses for engineers and scientists (Wilson, 1972).

Wilson, however expantiates the fact that, many types of remedial adult education have an economic value; there is

persuasive evidence that literate workers are more efficient than illiterate workers. Hence any form of adult education which enables students to obtain specific qualifications is economic since it helps those who are successful to get better job, this is the personal aspect of the increase in trained manpower.

In a related field is worker's education, adult education deals with the organisation of trade unions, collective bargaining, industrial relations, and related subjects. Although there is a strongly held view that its approach should be broadened by a general consideration of the place of the worker in society (ILO, 1972).

In the family context, adult education is the proposition, experimented within the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany, that workers' education is too limited a concept and their families should be associated with workers who are taking courses. In this way, it is argued, a bridge may be built with entire communities, young and old alike. This is a belief which caused the United automobile workers of America to establish their Family Education Centre at Black Lake in Michigan. Thus, the Automobile workers, spend at least three quarters of a million dollars a year on its educational programme. It is believed that a new attitude is appearing among its members, which it had described as 'yearning for greater self-reliance and an independence of spirit' (Feinstein, Otto, and Engela, Fred 1977). Thus, to meet this new attitude it provides educational classes, extension courses, correspondence courses, classes leading to the high school diploma, summer schools and winter institutes.

However, while all of these offerings are valuable, the union feels that something more and different is needed, and that the traditional concept of worker education should be replaced with that of family education. In this respect, it hopes to discover new dimensions for workers' education, especially through provision for members' families creating a bridge between the union and the community. Infact, every social system exists to serve a specific need in society. Uwakah (1979) opines that, the more formal and highly structured systems have their own perceptions of that need and of their particular role in meeting it. Virtually all these systems are involved in adult education to some extent, although the degree of involvement and the recognition of adult education as such varies among the systems.

Peil (1977) acknowledges the function of adult literacy, as it affects social change. According to her, literacy fosters social change because new ideas can be widely and quickly spread. She stresses the point that, even with a fairly low level of education achievement, men and women who become literate, either by attending primary school or an adult literacy course, or through their own efforts, have access to government information and a useful tool for small-scale business.

Powel (1950) and Odokara (1974) in their view see adult education as being related to the needs of adults in terms of their ambitions, their interests, their expectations, and their goals generated by their broadening world of experience and to the new responsibilities which a changing society imposes. They perceived that, adult education derives its vitality in fulfilling its social roles by being sensitive to innovation to the changing character in human existence. Nevertheless, a strand of adult education seen as a 'national necessity' and committed to the development of an informed and participatory democracy continued, helping to create, form and direct the working class movement.

In a more serious note, every adult educationalist is an agent of change, and is committed to social change in so far as he works for the dissemination of educational values. But the fact that these voices were exceptions stress the general truth, that adult education in the West was aimed more at the advancement of the motivated individual in the 'Development' of society as a whole. For most adult educators, when they borrow the language of radicalism, social change will be brought about through individual voluntary development. If education is related to consciousness, the learning becomes a "social" as distinct from a purely "personal" activity. For those adult educators in the late 1960s who possessed a social purpose, large-scale structural change would come about through the increased awareness and decisions of individuals. But the trouble with this position is, however, that more than a century of adult educations in the West has not in fact led to any form of social change (O'Sullivan, 1981).

Adult education started in many of the developing countries as an instrument of freedom. In such African countries as Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania, classes in social, economic and political subjects were plentiful in the immediate pre-independence period and did much to spread the knowledge, which helped freedom to be gained. Since then the history of

adult education, stated in a general way, has been that it has been used by one-party governments to reinforce their power, spread their ideas, help in nation-building and support the process of modernisation (Lowe, 1975 and Warner, 1975).

They however, opined that adult education has gained in importance but no longer inspired by the principle of freedom in the sense of promoting free thought, freedom as association, and freedom sought by most developing countries is that of the nation as a collectivity, as one among other nations. The problems of national freedom have been hard to solve and crisis government has become a continuing experience. The one-party state is, even under conditions of stability, a form of crisis government.

Nevertheless, Mill (1975) puts it that, countries in which most people are illiterates, in which the standard of living is relatively low, in which health and social services are poorly developed because of poverty, and in which the experience of political freedom had been short, cannot, in all conscience, be blamed for having to depend on crisis government. In other words, the best form of government for any country is that which produces the best results for its people under the circumstances, which prevail. If through adult education the greater economic resources they expect become more quickly available, then many of the prospective benefits to which Mill referred will begin to appear. Greater resources, according to him, bring the possibility of investment capital becoming increasingly available, and thus even greater resources may be created. However, rising wealth makes possible extended social benefits, including better education, and in due course this should mean accelerated progress, especially since most developing societies are short of the skilled manpower which education can create.

Thus, another prospective benefit is that the general diffusion of knowledge throughout society which adult education can bring about means the development of an educational environment, from which children as well as adults benefit. Educated parents are as much a benefit to children as are schools; indeed without educated parents the work of the schools is less effective than it could be. Adult education can help to make the home both a means of stimulating and reinforcing learning (Lowe, 1975, Warner, 1975 and Mill, 1975).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it will be seen that developing societies are justified in concentrating their resources into forms of adult education directed towards nation building and modernisation. The social context of adult education involves the socio-economic activities of the people in the society. For instance, working with the agricultural extension agents, the adult educators could encourage our fishermen to form themselves in cooperative societies. The formation of viable cooperative societies among our fishermen should help them in pooling their small holdings into large holdings. Such larger holdings would probably find it much easier to get government attention and support as well as the kind of loans that could be useful in transforming fishing technology in Nigeria.

However, the education of rural workers suffers from the problem of scarcity of qualified personnels who possess professional skills in the organisation and mobilisation of such education programmes. It is believed that a substantial provision of agricultural extension means a notable advance in the general education of adults. It would be a good thing if this was recognised and the general education elements, knowledge of science, rationality, discussion and cooperation, were built upon to create a superstructure of general citizenship education.

For adult education to take its rightful place among other disciplines, and in order to find a lasting solution to the old problems and handicaps against which adult educators struggle; these writers are of the view that the public higher institutions should be made the centre of adult education with the Universities being helped with more fund for public relation including research, and recruitment of personnel for the promotion of adult education. Interests of adult educators should be aroused in research development in their fields to probe into some of the issues in adult education. And if adult education is ever to get rid of its marginal status and achieve a climate of opinion favourable to its development, more attention should be directed to suppressing administrative conservatism. Also, more efforts should be directed to the changing of the current image of adult education from that of extra-mural classes to a competitive image of regular academic discipline, and lifelong education.

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