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UNDERSTANDING ADULT EDUCATION PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

Essays in Honour of
Professor Kehinde Oluwaseun Kester

Edited by
Kola Kazeem
Kofoworola Adedayo Aderogba
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CHAPTER THREE

A Critique of Adult Education Programmes in Multiethnic Nigerian Society

C. O. Omoregie and O. Oyelami

Introduction

Development programmes ought to take societal cultures into consideration in order to ensure sustenance. In this wise, adult education programmes especially in the Nigerian multiethnic society appear to have largely failed to put cultural values into cognisance. The shortcomings in the method of teaching which overemphasises pedagogical method and contents that are outdated are identified in this chapter in order to ensure that adult education programmes are achievable for better delivery in the present-day Nigeria.

The objectives of this chapter are to identify how adult education programmes have failed to meet the needs of the target population within the context of culture. It also suggests factors that should guide some of its operations in a multiethnic Nigerian society. These objectives are achieved in the seven sections of the chapter. Section one addresses the different dimensions of adult education programmes from organisational learning to individual capacity building. Section two consists of various contexts where adult education programmes are operated in Nigeria.

Section three refers to the Nigerian contexts as that of a highly diversified society and it described it as such. How adult education is being practised was described in the fourth section. Section five draws some lessons from the small country of Sao Tome and Principé. After the lessons were drawn, section six proposes a critique of cultural literacy based strictly on the teaching and learning of indigenous languages. In section seven, the option of promoting cultural values such as hard work and trust is advanced. This chapter then concludes that the value

of respect for cultural and individual preferences should be promoted in adult education programmes if it will take those identified cultural values into consideration.

Dimensions of Adult Education Programmes in Nigeria

Adult education programmes range from basic adult literacy classes to functional Adult education programmes such as computer classes, language classes, skill acquisition, vocational education programmes. The practice of Adult education especially in work places can also mean training and development programmes. In such cases, it could be workers' education, in service training programmes and organisational learning. Njoku (2010) says that the practice of adult education as training and development remains the most attractive aspect of its system especially to those in their active working years usually in the public sector where employers demand additional knowledge or qualification for promotion.

Outside the civil and public services, adult education programmes could mean public enlightenment programmes, campaign, and mobilisation activities for development activities. At individual levels, there are adult education programmes meant for the development of personal capacity building like self directed learning programmes and lifelong education programmes.

The Multiethnic Nigerian Society

There are over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria. These groups have their variations in languages, types of food, belief system, religion, customs, behaviours, dispositions and attitudes. Ethnicity can be summed up in culture which shows itself in material (visible) forms like language, artifacts, food, and fashion and immaterial (invisible) forms such as values, norms and beliefs. These differences are such that people of one locality do not easily understand inhabitants in other communities. Yet these groups coexisted for over a hundred years before the advent of colonialists whose political and economic interests heightened differences of the social groups. Before modern means of transportation and communication, these groups hardly had frequent contacts with one another except through trading and war.

With the emergence and advancements in transportation and communications, frequent interactions have become possible and resultant conflicts are widespread. Intercultural conflicts mainly arise within the invisible dimensions of culture since culture can be seen as 'software' which certainly shapes the individual reality of group members but which nevertheless functions differently in each person (Gunay, 2016).

From the political history of Nigeria, ethnic groups have struggled to maintain peace and order among themselves especially within the three dominant groups namely: Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo whose languages have been codified and taught since early 20th century. Apart from these dominant groups, other minority groups include Ibibio, Efik, and Edo have their languages learnt in schools. This means that the aforementioned languages can be learnt in basic literacy classes.

Participants at Nigerian literacy centres have resisted the learning of local languages because they can speak these languages before coming to the centres. Even when these languages formed their alphabets from English language and familiarity with these indigenous languages would significantly enhance proficiency in writing English, participants prefer to learn how to write English language instead of their local languages first.

Adult Education Programmes in a Multi Ethnic Nigerian Society

Adult and non-formal education programmes have been largely influenced by the formal sector not only in terms of content but also method of delivery. Those that are often recruited are retired and serving school teachers who simply transfer the discipline and method of the formal school system to literacy centres. This was highly criticised by Knowles (1978). He advocated and promoted andragogy as a distinctive method of helping adults learn. Despite this postulation, literacy centres are still run through pedagogical method of teaching even when it does not support the cultural methods of learning by doing typified by apprenticeship in traditional education system.

In the conception and administration of adult education programmes, state governments in Nigeria are usually more interested in the numbers of literacy centres created and fund expended on training

and not the content and functionality of the centres and training workshops. For example, the Lagos state governor Ambode in 2016 said 'we plan to increase the number of basic and post literacy centres from five hundred and thirty two (532) to one thousand (1000) . . . we will also engage additional 1,000 facilitators who will be trained in basic skills and techniques in the teaching of Adult Education.' The problem that literacy education faced in successive administrations in Lagos state was not addressed by the Governor.

Another problem in the implementation of Adult Education programmes of Ondo state government between 2008 to 2016 which was commended for having the first adult education ministry in Nigeria, was lack of training and retraining of facilitators to manage the many centres created all over the state and discontinuation of graduation ceremony that served as motivation, advocacy and feedback on the programme.

Training and retraining of facilitators and graduation ceremonies of graduates of the programme are very important in that part of the country because of the high premium people place on such ceremonies to show others that they are making progress in their endeavour. Graduation ceremony and regular seminars and workshops of facilitators would therefore enhance self-esteem of stakeholders and participants.

Lessons in Cultural Literacy From Other Lands

In the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principé a Portuguese-speaking island in the Gulf of Guinea in Africa where Freire and Elza in 1987 practised as adult educators, they reported that culture notebooks were used by learners as basic texts. These texts were designed to meet the objective of the literacy campaign, namely for the people to participate effectively as subjects in the reconstruction of their nation. It is necessary, in fact, for adult literacy and post-literacy to be at the service of the nation's reconstruction and contribute to the people so that by taking more and more history into their own hands, they can shape their history.

What took place in Sao Tome and Principé was the unveiling of reality. The educational approach to which the government has committed itself unmask the truth; it does not hide the truth to benefit

the ruling class. The basic themes of this literacy campaign are:

- (i) comprehension of the work process and the productive act in its complexity;
- (ii) ways to organise and to develop production;
- (iii) the need for technical training (which is not reduced to a narrow, alienating specialisation);
- (iv) comprehension of culture and its role, not only in the process of liberation, but also in national reconstruction;
- (v) problems of cultural identity, whose defence should not mean the ingenuous rejection of other cultures' contributions (Freire and Macedo, 1987).

The interpretation that can be given to these adult education practices is the comprehension of culture and its role which can be seen in the naming of the classes as cultural circles in rural and urban areas in Sao Tome and Príncipe. 'In the cultural circles, the attitude of a curious and critical subject is a fundamental point of departure for the literacy process. This critical attitude is characterised by one who is always questioning one's own experience, as well as the reasoning behind this experience' (Freire and Macedo, 1987). This report appears strange to what one has observed for many years in the Nigerian system, where beliefs are seen as sacrosanct and as such remain unquestioned. This means that facilitators need to inculcate a critical attitude of Freire and Macedo (1987) who query the practices they saw on the field. They said, that "if it is impossible to write without practising writing, then in a culture of predominantly oral memory such as Sao Tome, a literacy programme, respecting the culture as it is at the moment, needs both to stimulate the oral expression of those becoming literate – in debates, in the telling of stories, in the analysis of facts – and to challenge people to begin to write" (Freire and Macedo, 1987).

In Nigeria, the opposite is the case in that the curriculum places much emphasis on writing as against oral memory. As it is practised, placing writing skills over speaking is against the indigenous educational system. Oral memory is supported by traditional methods of learning where by learners are to memorise and internalise information and knowledge. For instance, a typical Ifa priest is believed to have memorised

Ifa corpus so much that he or she can recall easily after the exercise of divination. This element of memorisation can also be found in Islamic educational system which employs rote learning in Arabic citation which is globally appraised as a worthwhile means of learning. If cultural literacy according to Biao (2015) introduces every member of a society to those things they need to know about their own people and society and the knowledge of these important things, and the social practices in their milieu, makes them acceptable as valued and valuable members of the society (Hirsch, 2008), then participants in literacy classes need to be able to translate their learning experiences into cultural modes. This means that adult education programmes in Nigeria should integrate oral memory and discussions into writing exercises especially during learners' evaluation.

Critique of Cultural Literacy in a Multiethnic Nigerian Society

Despite arguments in support of using indigenous language for effective formulation and sustainable implementation of adult education programmes, one of the arguments against this position is the disintegrative factor that it can cause by promoting sectionalism and tribalism in an already polarised society like Nigeria. For culture to serve as a cohesive force, it needs a form of commonness in language or values system. Presently, Nigeria does not have an indigenous language that is common to everyone in the country. The development of *wazobia* dictionary has not been completed since the early 1980s and adoption of Hausa has also met with criticisms of continued domination. How then would local languages be so taught in Nigerian literacy centres without paying attention to the lingua franca which is English language? Ability to write and speak English language confers social and economic recognition to its users in Nigeria. The consequence of colonisation was that many Africans struggled to acquire English, French and Portuguese languages so as to be appointed as clerks, cooks, interpreters and teachers (Adelore, 2000).

For years, in Nigeria, since colonisation and independence, English language has served as a unifying language that brought the over 250 ethnic groups together. It has promoted social integration to a large extent. Adegbija (2004) submits that English is seen generally from a predominantly positive stance, especially with regard to its perception

as being of uttermost utility in nation building, its role as a medium of education and as a language that unites different ethnic groups. Ouane and Glanz (2011) also opines that the 'language question in Africa touches upon self esteem and feelings of identity and reflects not only past and present political, economic and cultural dependencies, but also relates to fundamental and enduring hardcore governmental politics, internal and external influences'.

Literacy education programmes are organised in Nigeria with the underlying political and international influences. The international organisations who promote adult literacy would not promote the learning of indigenous languages that they cannot easily understand without interpretation. Hence, in consonance with the orientation of sponsors, the planners and organisers of literacy programmes have benefitted immensely from the usage of English, the common language, and have planned curriculum and printed materials for use in all the centres in the country. Whether these primers have effectively produced the desired outcomes in learners is another issue for consideration especially when one considers the theoretical background of adult education that learners should participate in curriculum development. One of the common challenges of multilingualism is how it can be operationalised and integrated into adult learning programmes so as to enhance the literacy development of all learners and ensure good – quality provision (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016). Lucas (2013) paints what happened at a time in the formal school system. Schools forbade pupils from speaking in their mother tongue referred to as vernacular which produced élite who could not speak a sentence without inserting European words in it'. That is hardly possible in the non-formal sectors because participants are already familiar with their local, albeit oral language before contact with basic or functional literacy.

The realities of agitations from different ethnic groups in Nigeria could bring to question whether English language has actually brought true integration. Ethnic groups strongly canvass for primordial affinities with their members who are mostly identified with dialects and local languages. Within the context of linguistic multiplicities and political attachment through the legal sovereignty in Nigeria, there will be need to look elsewhere. Immaterial culture that are plausible as against

learning in local languages which participants at both basic and post basic literacy centres even resist are cultural values of hard work, trust and respect. After all, intercultural education is not only about indigenous language, rather, it is the process of 'acquiring increased awareness of subjective cultural context (world view), including one's own, and developing greater ability to interact sensitively and competently across cultural contexts as both an immediate and long-term effect of exchange (Bennett, 2009).

This means that intercultural education in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria can mean promotion of cultural values to develop traditional intelligence. Omoregie (2015) argues that culture has been seen to increase traditional intelligence which involves sensing (to perceive immediate, real, practical facts of experience and life) and intuition (to perceive possibilities of relationships and meaning of experiences. Traditional intelligence are found in indigenous education which Omoregie (2015) has shown to include cultural action (language and etiquette at home and workplace and peer group in the community), and informal education (spontaneous learning as individuals interact with their social and physical environments in the process of day to day living). Much more than learning local languages in literacy centres, premium should be placed on cultural values that promote social capital among people and productivity in individual lives. According to Byrne (2016) training/learning is worthless or even dangerous without the right character. This was supported by Ayodele-Bamisaiye (2016) when she concludes that 'ultimately, character determines the human person and also largely determines the outcome of human life. A person's character is his/her definition and his/her life is far as humanly possible determined by his/her character'.

The Promotion of Cultural Values in Adult Education Programmes

The Nigerian society is inundated with vices such as laziness, abuse of technology and high level of mistrust among peoples. In order to combat these anti social problems, hard work and trust are suggested in this paper as antidotes that non-formal education programmes can use in the promotion of its programmes.

Hard work refers to engaging in activities consciously and with commitment in order to achieve desired personal, organisational and community goals. Chinese literature and folklore have many moral tales about hardworking people of China. According to Beijing Review (2011) 'the work ethic of hard work is not exclusive to adults . . . all over China you will find children and young students go to prep schools often until late at night, and or during weekends'. A familiar scene in Nigerian communities is viewing centres and many hours of excessive attention paid to watching European leagues or films. These are attitudes that promote obsessive interest in entertainment over and above more extensive and productive activities that can benefit both individual and communities.

Trust has been identified by Oritz-Ospina and Roser (2016) as an indispensable element for sustaining well being among people. Since there are noticeable high level of mistrust between the government and those governed, institutions and the public, extended family members and employers and employees, adult education programmes should as a matter of urgency incorporate in its programmes skills and attitudes that would promote trust and peaceful coexistence to avoid complete breakdown of order in the Nigerian polity.

Respect involves giving honour to other people including workers and customers in the work place with the attitude that work is possible because people patronise the workplace. These values have become very essential in the workplace that can be described as unfriendly and conflict-laden due to harsh economic hardship and identity crisis caused by social and religious sentiments. In the present scenario of diversities in the workplace, there are exigencies of developing respect and trust for one another which do not come automatically.

Conclusion

Rather than the advocacy for learning indigenous languages, this chapter has argued that the most important element for the promotion of adult education programmes in a multiethnic society like Nigeria is that adult educators should become culturally competent by embracing hardwork and trust in human capacity to solve its problems. They should hold a high respect for individual differences and acceptance that there are

many ways of viewing the world. They need to take a cue from a saying among the Yoruba that there are many ways that lead to the market. adult education practitioners and professionals have to respect and trust other people's views.

Literacy programmes in communities should also include memorable words, traditional stories, the work they do, songs that the people sing and then build literacy stories and lessons around heroes and heroines that their target population respect.

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