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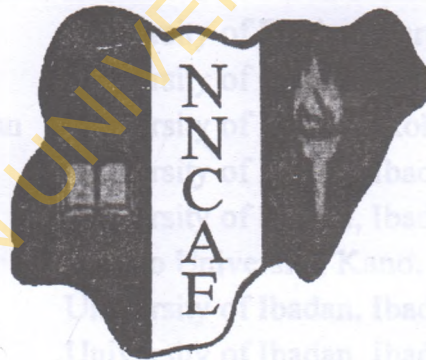
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Theme:

Repositioning Adult Education for Social Transformation and Good Governance.



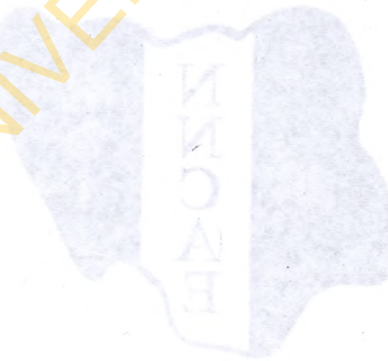
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ENSURING IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY TO ADULT LEARNERS THROUGH TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR FACILITATORS IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper reports efforts of Abia State government in Nigeria towards promoting mass literacy for adult learners in order to meet EFA (Education for All) goal for which the National Commission for Mass Education (NMEC) was established. The study is predictive that mass education should improve in Abia State in the years to come because of the intervention programmes that had been organised for three consecutive years 2017, 2018 and 2019. During the intervention programmes, the topics of discussion centred around the definition of adult education, adult education and development, who adult learners are, facilitators' work and meeting points between facilitators and learners. Having trained five hundred and thirty-nine (539) facilitators with assistance of three resource persons from the academia, administrators of adult education and experienced facilitators on the field for these years, expectations of the state government are high.

Keywords: Mass literacy, Adult Education, Service delivery and Learning to do

Introduction

Abia State is not insulated from known challenges of Adult Education programmes in Nigeria as reported by Anyika & Afonja(2015), Omolewa(2015), Aderinoye(2018), Umana(2018). They reported that Adult Education programmes suffer from marginalisation by government agencies who focus more on formal primary, secondary and tertiary education systems thereby subjecting adult and non - formal to lack of fund, lack of political will, poor reward of facilitators, incompetence and lack of manpower development of facilitators, sense of shame by adult learners, high level of attrition, lack of facilities and use of inappropriate teaching or instructional materials.

Out of the problems, this paper emphasizes aspects of the problems that can be resolved by facilitators. Those problems confronting adult literacy would be lessened or totally eradicated if facilitators are well prepared and regularly retrained. This can be true to the extent that the facilitators themselves are ready to imbibe the four pillars of learning: learning to do; learning to know; learning to be; and learning to live together (Faure, 1972). Doing, knowing, being, and living together make learning holistic in the twenty first century. Since no one can give what he or she does not have, facilitators should learn to do, learn to know, learn to be and possess capacity to live together before they can help learners. The resource persons discussed definition of adult education, adult education and development, adult learners, facilitators and adult learners. These topics have been explained in this paper as prerequisite for ensuring improved service delivery of mass literacy education in Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

The Abia State Agency for Mass Education and Non-Formal Education had experienced some setbacks over the years. At the inception of a new administration in 2015, the agency planned training workshops for facilitators for three years, 2017, 2018 and 2019. After the training programmers, the agency then did a formative assessment of the training programmes in order to ascertain its effectiveness. The assessment was seen by some as politically motivated. Hence an external agency outside the state was asked to appraise the training programme.

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. find out the challenges faced by mass literacy agency in Abia state;
- ii. examine the training programmes that have been organised to solve the problems of literacy programmes in the state;
- iii. and determine the extent to which the training programmes have solved the problems of mass literacy.

This study answered the following research questions: what are the challenges facing mass literacy agency in in Abia State? How have training programmes organized solved the problems of literacy in the state and to what extent have the training programmes solved the problem of mass literacy?

Adult Education re - described

Amidst many definitions and descriptions of Adult Education, that of Anyanwu (1987), portrays it as 'a response to educational needs of men and women'. It tends to emphasize the whole range of part-time educational provisions for persons whose social and economic responsibilities give them adult status within a community. Adult education is seen as part of the wider process of lifelong learning, and includes fundamental or remedial, general, vocational, professional, civic, social, cultural and recreation education for adults of all ages. It should be noted that lifelong learning is not restricted to adults alone. It is only a concept that states that education remains a continuous process which starts from when one is born until when one dies.

The goals of Adult Education can be drawn from the definition of Adult Education that has been provided. It is also derivable from government policies on education. For example, the Nigerian National Policy on Education (FGN, 2013) states that the goal of Adult Education among others is to: provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education. These include the nomads, migrant families, the disabled and other categories or groups, especially the disadvantaged group.

To attain the goal of Adult Education, the Federal Government of Nigeria established a National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non – Formal Education. The Commission has monitored and evaluated mass literacy programme and facilitated communication between the commission and state and local agencies.

Table 1 Percentage of literate and non – literate in Nigeria

Geo political Zones	Population	Literate	Non-literate	Total	% Literate	% Non-literate
South-South	28,745,363	20,696,661	8,048,702	28,745,363	72	28
South-East	21,915,213	16,874,714	5,040,499	21,915,213	77	23
South-West	38,005,472	31,164,487	6,840,985	38,005,472	82	18
North-West	48,936,923	25,447,200	23,489,723	48,936,923	52	48
North-East	25,387,990	9,901,314	15,486,676	25,387,990	39	61
North-Central	27,895,350	15,063,487	12,831,863	27,895,350	54	46
Total	190,886,311	119,147,863	71,738,448	190,886,311	59	41

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2012) Social Statistics, National Bureau of Statistics, Abuja.

Table 1 consists of data on literacy for (2017) in Nigeria. The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) did a projection based on growth rate, provided by the National Population Commission, using Exponential Equation (EXPO), Base Data: NBS (2012)). Table 1 shows that 41% of Nigerian population is illiterate. For EFA to be achieved, therefore, there is need for more urgent interventions. Abia State took up the challenge of training facilitators.

Adult Education and Development

Communities and organisations should be interested in Adult Education because of its close ties with development. There is an assumption in Adult Education that development starts at the foundation when a person is literate. UNESCO (1962) said 'a person is literate when he has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community, and whose attainments in reading, writing and arithmetic make it possible for him to continue to use these skills toward his own and community's development.' Despite the raging debate on the relationship between literacy and development. Akinpelu (2002) concluded that 'all the trends of the development of any nation point to an absolute indispensability of literacy, if the development is to be lasting and sustainable'.

Adult learners

Everyone would not fit into the description of adult learners following the characteristics of Malcom Knowles. Knowles (1980) said adult learners are self - directed, have reservoir of experience which they bring to the learning situation, have self-esteem and desire immediate application of what they are learning. Adult learners have multiples roles they are playing at one and the same time. These learners can be workers, who have roles as married people, have commitment to their communities and are financially responsible to the family. Many of these roles usually clash but they are not mutually exclusive.

Beyond the description of maturity that dominates Knowles, there can be children who have much independence for them to suit into the description. They are in the non - formal sectors as street children, apprentices and house helps whose learning needs are like those of adults. Facilitators have to understand these characteristics of learners before they can help them learn.

Facilitators' work

The underlying belief in improving service delivery to adult learners is what facilitators ought to do for adult learners. From the onset of another administration, facilitators of Adult Education programmes were singled out as the most important agent for improved service delivery. Instead of asking what governments, international organisations or members of immediate community and learners can do, the agency focused on what facilitators can do to improve service delivery.

The view that facilitator is the most important agent in adult literacy is supported by National Policy of Education (2004) 'that there is no educational system that can grow beyond the quality of its teachers'. Likewise, there is no Adult Education programme that can exceed the quality of its facilitators.

Facilitation means the process of simplifying a task. What one has learnt over the years becomes a habit whereby one no longer thinks so deeply before one does it. Facilitators are those who have made learning a habit. Examples of tasks that could be initially difficult are driving, typing and cooking. At a time in one's life when one has performed these tasks repeatedly then it can be done as if they are not thought of and has become part of the person's life. Facilitation is making neophytes or beginners perform tasks easily which have already become second nature of veterans. It is not an easy job to facilitate learning in a rapidly changing world with competing interests and distractions.

Facilitators are otherwise called animators, change agents, lifelong learners, and promoters of self - directed learning, motivators and mobilisers. He/she is not a dictator, Mr/Mrs know all, or a mere teacher/lecturer. Facilitators are not just teachers because more is required from them. Some of the assumptions are that if it is not every person that can lead then leaders are made and not necessarily born, and if it is not every educated person that can teach, then teachers are made and not born. Also not every teacher can be a facilitator. In Nigeria, facilitators are made through graduating from educational programmes of colleges of education or departments of Adult Education of public higher education in Nigeria. For the three years that training programmes have been organised

for facilitators, resource persons have been sourced from departments of Adult Education in universities and experienced practitioners in the field of adult education ranging from non-government organisations and charity organisations across the country.

Facilitation has a long history in Socrates who believed that knowledge is innate and that what teachers do is to make people come to the realisation of what they already know. The method of question and answer is called Socratic midwifery. It is from this root that andragogy – the art and science of helping adults learn can be derived. Teaching or lecturing or sermonizing cannot be popular in Adult Education. Rather Adult Educators make learners realise what they already know. To be able to do this, facilitators need attributes of being open, self-discovered, learners discovered, empathetic, selflessness, forbearing, humble, focused, professional (ability to use different methods or improvise), learners, guides, reflective, creative, culturally minded, and intrinsically motivated.

Meeting points between facilitators and learners

The meeting places for lessons in the formal school system are classrooms, school environment or wherever teachers designate as such. In the non - formal sector where Adult Education subsists and facilitators operate, the meeting places are everywhere where interactions can take place between any two persons. They are places usually preferred by learners. Such places in the information age include the digital or virtual spaces. Radio was very popular in the past but these days of social media, information technology and networking, computer devices have changed the narrative.

Facilitators no longer wait for the rigid time and place to have interactions and even access their learners. This has become very important because adult learners are becoming too much engaged in activities that take them away from the typical classroom setting, hence the need for flexible outlets for learning. The predictions of Illich (1971) of learning web in his deschooling makes one appreciate what is happening through information explosion and management which have been created in the contemporary society.

Results and discussion of findings

The results and findings of this report are stated in answer to the research questions of the study.

The challenges facing mass literacy agency in Abia State was found in the responses of facilitators over three years. The responses to the questions posed to facilitators showed very low understanding of their task. Ninety-three percent (93%) of the facilitators did not answer correctly in 2017, the percentage reduced to fifty-four(54%) in 2018 and thirty-six (36%) in 2019. This showed that the training had positive impacts on them. In other words, 39% of the participants had more knowledge to perform their task better.

The feedbacks from participants are presented as questions and responses. The resource persons over the three years answered the questions posed to them by facilitators who were the participants. Some of the responses are presented below:

Question: How can we motivate learners by giving them more work when some are slow learners?

Response: Facilitators should try as much as practicable to individualise their discussions and follow the pace of each learner.

Question: What can we do when one of the spouses (especially husband) is not in support of the learner?

Response: The organizers and facilitators must seek the permission of spouses especially that of husbands.

Question: Non-verbal method of ensuring discipline was identified in literacy centres. What of if the non-verbal is not effective?

Response: More understanding is required in order to check excesses of adults since punishment is completely out of place.

Question: What can facilitators do when attendance is low during seasons of celebration when learners do not come or have travelled for example during planting seasons for farmers?

Response: Take learning to them or fix more convenient time for them.

Question: Some learners came to study centres to learn skills; how can we accommodate them?

Response: Skills acquisition should be part of literacy activities.

Question: How do we help learners who have phobia for examination?

Response: Do the examination more for them until the fear disappears. Instead of examination facilitators should use words like quiz or check rather than examinations.

Question: What are the roles of facilitators in achieving Millennium Development Goals and (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Response: Facilitators are agents for achieving education for all as stated in the two development agendas.

Methods of organizing the training programmes in the State

The state government has organised a three-day workshop consecutively for three years for the average of five hundred and thirty-nine (539) facilitators in south senatorial zone (219), central senatorial zone (180) and north senatorial zone (140). Each senatorial district had a day each in April of each year. In the course of the training the following questions were asked as preparation for the interaction: Why is the government interested in Adult education? Who are Adult learners? Who are facilitators of adult learning? How should facilitators carry out their work? Where can facilitators and adult learners meet? When can we say we have an improved service delivery to adult learners? How can government and other stakeholders ensure and sustain improved service delivery to adult learners?

The extent that the training programmes solved the problem of mass literacy

Apart from questions asked and responses given, facilitators have success stories they shared that encouraged other participants. Somebody came to learn how to write figures in words because her husband was a business man. The facilitator succeeded in doing this

but noted that the learner stopped coming to the centre. Contributions of other participants showed that the learner could have been kept by, more intimate relationship with other learners. The facilitator was encouraged to develop in the learner more hunger for knowledge.

Some facilitators observed that for the justification of government investments in mass literacy, they should ensure that adult learners mainstream into formal school system. The management of the agency informed participants that the mandate of the agency has become flexible to accommodate different levels of completers.

Despite the postulation of learners' involvement in planning their programmes; 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.

Feedback on the three - day workshop organised for the past three years showed that the state government had promoted adult learning and participants observed that much more still needed to be done in terms of increasing facilitators' remuneration while the participants commended the programme and they looked forward to more capacity building programmes in the future.

Measures for ensuring improved service delivery for mass education

Since adult learners are faced with numerous social and economic challenges, Adult Education programmes have to meet these needs at the same time. Typical literacy centres or study centres that only help learners to learn writing, reading and counting are no longer doing enough. These basic skills have to be integrated with skill acquisition programmes that would enable learners to be multi skilled. To achieve computer literacy and effective use of mobile phones would assist the learners to be able to continue learning these skills on their own when they have been introduced to it. Facilitators have to be able to identify the various needs of learners and make them learn according to their interests. The facilitator does not need to have all the skills to be able to guide learners, what is most important is to direct learners to where they can access the skills that they desire.

In some instances, organisers of Adult Education programmes have used the skills that are mostly found in a community to provide facilities in their centres or use the opportunity of the community centres to have their skills training for learners.

There will be improved services when the following are realisable:

- i. When those who have participated in the programme campaign about it. Less would be spent on public announcement and adverts.
- ii. When private sector sees it as their duty to advance adult learning in the communities
- iii. When there is consistent and progressive history of growth both in quantity and quality of learners that attend adult learning programmes.

- iv. When it has become a priority of government to pursue the goals of Adult Education in Nigeria. Government should pursue Adult Education goals because according to Nyerere (1978) Adult Education engenders rapid development. The society cannot afford to wait for their children whose contribution to development would take about twenty years before it could benefit from it. He saw priority of Adult Education programmes as the best way of fast tracking national development.
- v. There is need for tracking training programmes such that adult learning activities in Nigeria can be coordinated by government agencies.

Conclusion

Before there can be an improved delivery, there will be need to do a formative (on - going) or summative (final) evaluation of the programme by using different scales for measurement of the programme. Some assessment or evaluation models are interested in the quantity, the number of people that have become literate in a period and the quality of the service delivery but then facilitators need to know that literacy programmes are qualitative when they have chain effects in the lives of the people. That is, when those who have participated in the programmes become campaigners of its usefulness to others. Omoregie and Abiona(2018) opined that literacy has both private and public good and everyone ought to be concerned about its promotional campaigns.

Feedback from the training showed that the relevance of Adult Education should not be measured only by number of learners who write for certificate examinations and can mainstream into the formal system. Rather, it should be measured on learners' quality of life and life satisfaction. There is need for training to be more regular for facilitators so that they can develop their capacity in facilitation since ninety percent of facilitators trained came from the formal educational sector without any training in facilitation.

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