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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
Olufunke Temitope Ogidan
Margaret 'Bola Oni

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CHAPTER SIX

Improving Adult Education Learning Potentials in Nigeria: The Need to Build Capacities of Community Libraries

A. A. Omokhabi and U. C. Osu

Introduction

Learning is the art of acquiring or identifying one's potential or modifying or reinforcing existing knowledge, behaviours, skills, values, or preferences which may lead to a potential change in synthesising information, depth of the knowledge, attitude or behaviour relative to the type and range of experience needed by learners. Learning does not happen all at once, but it is built upon and is shaped by previous knowledge through improving methods of learning. To that end, learning may be viewed as a process, rather than a collection of factual and procedural knowledge. Learning produces changes in the organism and the changes produced are relatively permanent. Learning is the lifelong process of transforming information, ability, training and experience into knowledge, skills, behaviours, and attitudes. Human learning may occur as part of education, personal development, schooling, or training. It may be goal-oriented and may be aided by motivation. Learning is an aversive event which can't be avoided or escaped. It is called learned helplessness through education, i.e. education is a human right which none must be denied of (Subrahmanian, 2002). Education is also important to national development, and this is why every government all over the world has made commitments to citizens both young and old to have access to education. Perhaps, educationists, sociologists, researchers and psychologists have provided certain criteria for identifying and determining whether learning has taken place in the adult learner by

assessing their potentials in different forms. For learning to be said to have taken place in adult learners, there must be the element of change in their behaviour both overtly or covertly. Criterion in change of behaviour must be based on exposure to the environment while environment as it is used in this context refers to learning situations or any situation that allows one to gain some experience within his society coverage. Learning therefore, involved a change in the behaviours of adult learners as a consequence of their experiences and improving their natural and artificial potentials. This potential can manifest in the way the individual thinks (cognitive), acts (psychomotor) or feels (affective). However, this potential in adult learning education can be achieved by developing community libraries to facilitate learning for adult learners. This chapter therefore, looks into how capacities of community libraries can be improved to enhance adult learning potentials in Nigeria.

Concept of Adult Learning

Adult learning is important for economic growth, social and personal development. However, it is still a weak link in the lifelong learning agenda for underdeveloped and developing country. Adult learning can enhance the human capital of individuals and nations. It can bring important social benefits in terms of improved civic participation and social cohesion as well as personal benefits, such as improved health and well-being, and greater self-confidence. However, despite these benefits, there is insufficient participation in adult learning programmes. The low participation of more disadvantaged groups in adult learning is due mainly to lack of motivation and other barriers such as time, availability and accessibility of libraries, financial constraints and lack of quality educational programmes.

Adult education in Nigeria as a developing country covers literacy, vocational technical education, open apprenticeship, labour education, and continuing education for remedial purposes and professional competence building and upgrading of skills and status. In the opinion of Okediran and Abidoye (2001), Adult education is a tool that frees people from poverty-ridden situations and it is also a tool through which individuals and nations rise above their challenges. Adedokun (2008) expresses the view that adult and non-formal education have their aims

in bringing about social transformation and reconstructing society to make it modernised, productive, participative and value-oriented. This is why Omolewa (2006) in Adedokun (2008) sees it as an instrument for moving forward, in that adult and non-formal education helps people and institutions to meet their challenges and provides opportunities for re-growth to happen by providing avenue for change in individuals, communities, societies and nations at large. The implication of this is that adult education assists its recipients to experience transformation and a change of circumstances, and so it is a source of providing opportunities for people at various levels. Omolewa (1981) in Adedokun (2012) defines adult education as that education that redresses the imbalance between education received when one is young and that of later life. To him the earlier education is not adequate to save one from professional as well as cultural obsolescence during later in life.

The major purpose of adult learning is to eradicate the rate of illiteracy in the country and also to promote the psychomotor domain of education system most especially in Nigeria by creating skill acquisition to reduce the rate of unemployment. Specifically, the objectives of mass literacy, adult and non-formal education as stipulated by FRN (2004:25) include:

- (i) 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 gender;
- (ii) Provide functional and remedial education for those young people who did not complete secondary education;
- (iii) Provide education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills;
- (iv) Provide in-service, on-the-job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills, and
- (v) Give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for community enlightenment.

These objectives are laudable and should be pursued vigorously in order to develop the human power, resources of economic growth and development, improving skill acquisition of potential learners in the country. In pinpointing the major objectives of adult education in developing the human power with availability of resources in Nigeria, this chapter is geared towards the strategies for improving adult education programme through building of community libraries to aid the potentials of adult learners.

Benefits of Adult Learning

A recent study summarised the research evidence about the benefits of adult learning in ways to improve adult learners' potentials. These benefits circulate through the learners themselves, employers and for the wider community, these are the reasons why this chapter suggests the building of community libraries for improving adult learning education.

For learners, positive outcomes from participation in learning or from completing courses and achieving qualifications are:

Economic: Improved employability comes from individuals' participation in learning and higher wages and incomes come from improved basic skills gained from learning and the acquired qualifications;

Wellbeing: Improved general wellbeing (including improvements in self-confidence) as well as improved health (physical and mental) can be brought about by participation in learning; and

Social: Improved disposition to voluntary and community activity and improved civic attitudes can be brought about as a result of participation in learning.

For employers, the positive outcomes that arise from learning are:

- (i) A firm's innovation performance can be increased as a result of the increased skills and competencies brought about by workforce participation in learning;
- (ii) A firm can benefit from a more motivated workforce as a result of their participation in learning; and

- (iii) Economic benefits accrue to the business as a result of the benefits brought by innovation and a more motivated workforce. Thus, increased productivity and profitability result from increased workforce participation in learning and the business' investment in this.

For the community, positive benefits, both economic and social, accrue from increased adult participation in learning:

Economy status: Countries where there are high rates of adult participation in learning are more economically competitive and feature higher levels of GDP; and

Social interaction: Participating in adult learning and increasing skills have positive effects on behaviours in relation to health, the environment and reducing reoffending.

Conditions and Quality for Improving Adult Learning

From the base of governmental levels, i.e. federal, state and local government of Nigeria have established Adult Learning Institutions of diverse magnitude, shapes and orientation that create increasing access and opportunities for adults to learn throughout life yet access, availability and utilisation of libraries are not put in place for adult learners.

Some of these institutions at the federal level include:

- (i) The National Commission for Mass Education,
- (ii) National Teachers Institute, Kaduna,
- (iii) Centre for Management Development (CMD) Lagos,
- (iv) Administrative Staff College of Nigeria, and
- (v) A host of other institutions of higher learning with their outreach educational programmes.

From each of these institutions the state adopts legislation and other appropriate means to ensure that potential adult learner enjoys their right to learn, through international, national and local conferences, seminars and workshops organised by various bodies, but this chapter however, intends to improve the adult learners through community's libraries to help the learners reaching their potential. Learning demands/

needs of adult learners are usually met through needs analysis and needs diagnostic studies. At times, opinion polls are carried out to determine learning needs of adults. In a nutshell, from various indications there is overwhelming evidence in support of a free expression of people's demand for learning. The introduction and wide use of the new information technology most especially (Internet surfing) from website, mobile communication system (GSM) by Nigerian adults make free flow of information possible which increases their social lifestyles. Moreover, building of community libraries can aid their academic performance if properly incorporated in establishment of adult learning centres. With the open learning system, university extramural classes, and other techniques benefits of learning are widened for learners to make informed choices suitable to their aspirations.

The relationship between education and development is an important one in the sense that education is a key index of development as education improves productivity and health, and reduces negative features of life such as child labour as well as bringing about empowerment (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2002). In this light, adult education which covers all areas of human endeavour must not be neglected, and adequate provision should be put in place in order for them to learn easily and conveniently to achieve their aims, goals and objectives of education that other regular students are achieving.

The Needs for Improving Adult Learning in Nigeria Education System

Improving the quality of adult learning in Nigeria requires adequate and proper facilities to enhance the objectives of establishment of adult education. Based on the knowledge gathered from the scholars reviewed, this chapter provides major key points in improving adult learning in Nigeria which includes:

- (i) to use adult learner or trainer to improve the quality of practice of knowledge, skill acquisition, increment level of literacy, etc.;
- (ii) to set standardise professional responses in education system,
- (iii) to develop functional literacy education for people in the country;

- (iv) to provide functional, accessible and remedial education for the youth and adult learner;
- (v) to inculcate in-service, job vocational and professional training to improve their skills;
- (vi) to provide the youth, adolescent adult citizens of the country aesthetic, human right, roles and responsibilities, cultural heritage and civic education for their enlightenment;
- (vii) to enhance communication skills for proper understanding and resolving conflict among them.

Based on the stated needs above, this chapter realises that for governments at all levels to achieve these, community libraries need to be organised, established and monitored to assist adult learners improving set-potentials. Therefore, this chapter describes concept of community libraries on adult learning education. It draws upon the impact of community libraries on adult learning education; also, it investigates the issues and challenges of community libraries on adult learning education.

What is Community Library?

Access to library resources and developing skills are important elements of the academic experience for all students. Yet adult learners experience barriers in the use of the library and its many resources. In the meantime, the advent of electronic information retrieval in university libraries has caused resources available to users to grow exponentially. Community libraries are internationally recognised as social institutions that can effect social and economic transformation in society most especially adult learners, for them to acquire necessary skills based on their cultural heritage. Community libraries have been highly regarded institutions since their designation as a location that all community members can use to their advantage, regardless of economic, educational level or social status or demographic background. Community libraries serve as common meeting spaces for interest groups, students, and businesses. They play an integral role in the assimilation of immigrants into communities, and act as hub for job-seekers, developing potential, increase in skill acquisitions, among others.

In carrying out this role of education community libraries, can provide necessary materials like textbooks, journals, magazines and exercise books related to the curriculum of the existing literacy institutions in the community, be it conventional schools or adult classes. In this way, it has assisted in the campaign to make the society a more literate one.

Community or community libraries are regarded as the people's university providing and independent decision taking (Oyegade, Nassarawa and Mokogwu, 2003). Community libraries attempt to meet a wide varies of readers needs, providing varied information resources such as textbooks, journals, literary books and other communications. For example, in the United States, community libraries are considered as particular form of the freedom of expression because they are conceived as a necessity for an informed society to enable the system function effectively (Aguolu and Aguolu, 2000). Then, if these libraries are developed in Nigeria for adult learners as perceived in this chapter, they will enhance and improve adult learner potentials and will help the country in reduction of the rate of illiteracy among people.

Impact of Community Libraries on Adult Learning Education

From the recent landscape of 21st century education system in Nigeria, students and professionals are expected to meet the necessary requirements of information, digital, and technological expertise that are applied throughout school systems and the workforce. These skills are required throughout the life of adult learners, and are no longer customarily to be mastered solely within schools. Consequently, there are also many opportunities in which support and instruction can be utilised to promote continuous achievement and realising one's potential through community libraries which are on the forefront as a vital resource with services, programmes, and instruction that can provide to all learners to achieve aims and objectives. Community libraries serve as cornerstones for community development across the county if well organised by the government and non-government for accessing information and technology, developing digital literacy skills, and providing numerous support services to students, families, and communities at larger. For generations, community libraries have offered critical services to address the needs of all learners.

Community libraries play a critical role in the preparation of adult learners through community library exposure. Research reports have identified community libraries as leaders in the developmental capacity in adult learners. Further, community libraries not only provide early learners with opportunities for the development of literacy skills, they also influence parent involvement at home, and act as a support system for at-risk children (American New York Comprehensive Center at RMC Research 6 Association of School Librarians, 2001). Similar findings can be seen through Epstein's theory, which states that overlapping spheres of influence – in this case the community library, family, and community – help students feel supported and motivated to succeed in school (Martinez, 2008).

The importance of community libraries on the development of early learners has proven to increase throughout the years. For example, a 1995 study by the National Center for Education Statistics showed that 86 percent of community libraries offered group programmes for preschoolers and kindergarteners, while only 56 percent of these libraries offered such programmes in 1988 (Herb, 2001). Additionally, these increases can be seen in New York State. In 2010, 76 percent of libraries offered early literacy programmes, whereas in 2007 only 67 percent of libraries offered the same. The role that community libraries play in early literacy development cannot be overlooked, as these programmes may offer the only opportunities children have for exposure to these skills before they enter school. Therefore, this could help adult learners to improve their potential if community libraries are made available and accessible for them as easy as basic needs.

Community libraries serve the needs of all students, especially as a valuable resource of support along their school pathways. One goal of community libraries is to raise achievement rates for all students. In conjunction with these increases in community library services, many consequently stress the challenges associated with this growth. In 2009, 52 million people obtained help using technology from a librarian or volunteer, and 16 million took advantage of community library offered computer classes (Clark and Visser, 2010). Across the country, almost 75 percent of libraries have reported that, for at least part of any given day, they have insufficient community access and workstations to meet

the needs of users (Public Libraries and The Internet, 2011).

Community libraries do however, understand the necessary and important role that they play in information and digital literacy skills development that facilitate adult learning education. In recent years, information and digital literacy have been regarded as the most important goals of community libraries and as essential services that are currently not being offered by other entities (Harding, 2008).

Granting of awards and scholarships is another way through which public libraries can assist in adult education especially in the rural areas. The scholarship is awarded to deserving people undertaking education programme in the community. These awards and scholarships to those who have excelled will encourage others to want to excel too, thereby making this gesture a form of literacy campaign.

Public libraries continue to play an important role in adult education programme in sustaining the diverse forms of cultural expressions. Public libraries acquire, process, organise and preserve materials which depict the way of life and experiences from others. Through public libraries, the adults' illiterates' class can develop the skills in computer usage in searching for collection, indexing and abstracting services.

Community libraries have been a highly regarded institution since their designation as a location that all community members can use to their advantage, regardless of economic or social status or demographic background. Andrew Carnegie once said that, "there is no such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Community Library, this community of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration" (Senville, 2009). This idea of a community centre is still being practised today, as community libraries serve all residents, regardless of age or income. Community libraries serve as common meeting spaces for interest groups, students, and businesses, play an integral role in the assimilation of illiteracy in the communities, and act as hub for job-seekers who can research information and receive instruction in the application process and other key activities in the search for a new job (Senville, 2009).

Lastly, community libraries can also train the personnel carrying out the different educational programme in the community. This can be

done by the library carrying out seminars, workshops and conference on the different subject areas of the literacy programmes; so that they can become better at their various fields. Public libraries can also carry out their roles as education providers for their communities by setting up literacy institutions such as adult literacy programmes in their communities. By doing this, public libraries would have successfully carried out a literacy campaign since adult literacy programme would aid literacy (Apotiade, 2002).

Issues and Challenges of Community Libraries in Nigeria

Feasibility work often requires community organisations and others to commit time and resources at risk, without any assurances that a project can proceed. Therefore, it is advisable to take a phased approach to exploring the feasibility of a community library proposal to avoid wasting resources on unviable projects. Some of the issues and challenges that may be facing building durable community libraries in improving the potential of adult learners are summarised below:

Intellectual freedom: The right to express ideas and receive information in the community may be the major problems for some students in that community or somewhere else.

Privacy in reading: The freedom to choose the way of reading by individual may be a major challenges for students who engage in using community libraries, to which personal information is monitored, collected, disclosed, and distributed among people who to use the libraries.

Intellectual property of an individual: A legal and policy framework to stimulate creativity and innovation, and to promote the progress of science and the useful arts through a fair and equitable balance of the rights and privileges of users, creators, and owners.

Equitable access: Student classes, barrier-free, and format-independent access to information for present and future users may be major problems in building of community libraries.

Infrastructure: Cost-effective use of physical and social facilities is another challenges facing building community libraries.

Also, there are major six key areas that need to understand and develop in more detail before building of community library:

- (i) Organisational development
- (ii) Developing the service and business model
- (iii) Information and digital technology
- (iv) Securing support
- (v) Understanding community benefits and outcomes
- (vi) Asset issues

Criteria for Building Community Libraries

Community library connects people and communities to knowledge, information and culture. Arts Council England Local Government Association (2012) submits that in the last few years, particularly since 2010, there has been a rapidly growing trend to involve communities in library service delivery in more significant ways – not only to support and enhance library services but also in some places to manage them or even take on ownership and management of library buildings. Community library must be capable of enhancing, harnessing and developing local people in their communities. Community library according to (Information, 1997) must be committed to serve as:

- (i) community learning centres, focussing particularly on the promotion of literacy and information awareness and the support of lifelong learning;
- (ii) centres for the promotion of, and participation in, living culture;
- (iii) centres for dissemination of information in all fields, with particular emphasis on information needed for participation in democratic decision-making and for the successful implementation of national development plans; and centres for recreational reading (pp. 25-26.)

This submission is in agreement with UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994) that the services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status.

Oyeronke (2012) confirms that Access to Information is very crucial. It accelerates the level of individual advancement as well as corporate educational development. Community library promotes access to information among community people because it promotes and develops reading as a pleasurable activity to stimulate the imagination and encourage creativity, provide opportunities and resources for lifelong learning, training and educational achievement, facilitate informal self-education, and contribute towards the raising of standards in the essential basic skills of literacy and numeracy, provide, and encourage the use of ICT to enable access to digital skills and services and continuously improve collection and training to meet the immediate needs of the community and to provide a solid foundation for future development.

Community library therefore, can assist the masses to attain literacy that is a prerequisite for any success in our national development, because the people being regarded as illiterate will have access to information as ignorance will be eliminated through access to library in their communities.

In setting up community library the following criteria must be considered:

- (1) the reasons for setting up a library and information service
- (2) first steps: the information audit
- (3) meeting the information needs of specialists
- (4) establishing the library: premises, design and technical requirements
- (5) staffing: recruitment and management
- (6) managing budgets and finance
- (7) networking and locating sources of information
- (8) acquisition, organisation and dissemination: print and electronic
- (9) services to be provided by the library
- (10) sources of support for the library inside and outside the organisation
- (11) promotion of the library
- (12) training staff and users.

Reasons for setting up a community library might be plentiful but

there must be need to define the priorities. If community library established for community people is to succeed, there must be need for substantial community support and a strong desire in community to retain the library and make a commitment to its success. Community involvement must be promoted. The community or catchment area must be large enough to sustain a viable library.

Conclusion

Community libraries have a very significant role to play in these situations of education system mostly for those students learning at old age. Community libraries are vital institutions which cannot be separated from education and adult learners. The provision of community libraries is crucial and indispensable to adult education in Nigeria. Therefore, whatever is done to improve the quality of adult education is done to improve the nation in creating innovation. The absence of community libraries will have negative effects on adult education and the country, since purpose of adult learning is to reduce the rate of illiteracy in country, hence community libraries are very important for adult learning to aid their potentials. Therefore, adult learners should be encouraged to use community libraries when available around them, measure the effect of the building of community libraries and it will result in success in fostering potentials in adult learners and creating of social inclusion in the long term. It is necessary to undertake comprehensive empirical research explicit the function of community libraries. Moreover, community libraries will play critical roles in the lives of all learners by offering early childhood learning opportunities, developing information and digital literacy, providing summer learning opportunities, supporting and operating as a foundation for lifelong learning opportunities.

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