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CONTENT

Expanding Workers' Education in Nigeria within the Context of EFA: The Study Circles Option

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Abstract

The world is moving to a point where every country begins to realise that where the right to education is guaranteed, people have a greater chance to enjoy other rights. The UNESCO and most national governments, across the world, now realise that education offers an answer to many of the world's problems. Thus, the aim of extending basic education to all; particularly the working adults with the context of Education for All (EFA); becomes highly imperative. Given this background, this paper is out to examine the EFA goals (Goals 3, 4 and 6) as they relate to workers' education in Nigeria. This is with the hope of achieving 50% improvement in adult literacy as well as meeting the qualitative learning needs of young and adults who constitute the active labour force of the country by 2015. However, it is the hope of the authors that equality of qualitative workers' education opportunity by 2015 may be achieved most readily, when the study circle culture is adopted. This will help provide conditions, which enable each working class citizen to develop to his/her full potentials

within a group dynamics. The use of study circle will help to ensure that today's organisations are turned into learning organisations where learning is not left to chance. Invariably the adoption of study circle by organisations in Nigeria, as suggested by the authors, would help to expand workers' education and obviously will contribute significantly to organisational changes. Therefore, it is the opinion of the authors that the study circle culture should be built into the psyche of an average Nigerian to ensure a sustained voice in governance at all level of our natural life.

Introduction

It was envisaged at the two world conferences on education held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and in Dakar in 2000 that some planned actions decided upon would result in creating a conditions that would remarkably provide an ample opportunities for all among concerned nations to have an education appropriately designed for meeting individual (children, youths and adults alike) specific learning needs. This therefore, implies that Education for All (EFA) has in recent time represented more than ever before a purposeful international commitment to education where at least every citizen of every society (either Developed or Developing) must have at least basic education (Ademokoya, 2008).

Suffice it to say that the world is moving to a point where every country begins to realise that:

> ...where the right to education is guaranteed, people have a greater chance to enjoy other rights. Knowledge opens the mind to the world, to other cultures, languages and ways of doing things. It empowers people, gives them a voice and unlocks their full potentials (UNESCO, 2002).

It therefore shows that UNESCO and most national governments across the world now realise that education offers an answer to many of the world's problems. Thus, the aim of extending basic education to all,

regardless of colour, race, sex, age or nationality; around the world has definitely captured the imagination of all nations. Surely the goals of EFA are of enormous significance and are based on the fact that education is an indispensable means of unlocking and protecting other human rights. With this, education is perceived as providing the scaffolding that is necessary to ensure good health, liberty, security, economic wellbeing and effective participating of the generality of the citizens in socio-economic and political activities (Kester, Akinwande and Gbenro, 2008). The Education for All has six major goals to achieve on or before year 2015. They are:

1. expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;

2. ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;

3. ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met;

4. achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;

5. eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by ensuring girls full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality; and

6. improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensure excellence of all so that recognizing and measuring learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

But specifically goals number 3, 4 and 6 appear to have specific implications for the workers' education in Nigeria.

From the above, it is obvious that it is an accepted fact that no state shall deny equal education opportunity to an individual on account of his or her

race, colour, sex, nationality, employment status or an account of disability. But there still exist some inherent prohibitions particularly among the working class. More working class citizens are restricted or constrained by some employment and/or organizational policy (ies) on training which prevents them from having access to basic or further education.

So it must therefore be stressed that even if government policies based on EFA goals were oriented in such a way as to fully encourage workers in Nigeria to pursue educational careers, it is still unlikely that the 50% improvement in the levels of working class literacy and the full assurance of their learning needs will be met. It is a known fact that barriers of prejudice, employment discrimination and ignorance impede equality of educational opportunities among the working class citizens.

Workers' Education Needs in the Agenda of EFA

There are conceptual variations as regards the concept of workers' education. According to Whitehouse (1989:350) "the concept of 'workers' education' varies from country to country" while Omole (1995) opines that the concept varies according to who is defining the concept and for what purpose it is meant for. Workers' education means different thing to the average worker (and their union); the employers of labour and to the government. However, Omole (1995:1) avers that in literature, the best known definition of workers' education is that of Hopkins (1988), who sees workers' education as:

> *That sector of adult education which caters for adults in their capacity as workers and especially as members of workers' organizations. Its immediate aims are virtually to increase the ability of workers to assume more responsibilities in their own organization... in their work places and in local and national decision-making bodies.*

No matter the conceptual disagreement over the concept of workers' education; the fundamental issues is that workers' education; should be seen not only as a necessary tool for the individual workers to improve upon their skills, understand their rights and obligations, run their organizations well, and live comfortably as citizen; it should also be perceived in the same sense as an education endeavour that must be undertaken not only by the workers but all who have one thing or the other to do with the working class (Omole, 1993). This is because according to Kester, Omoregie and Adeyeye (2006) workers' education has a unique opportunity of providing life experiences addressed to the crucial issues and problems confronting the working class citizens in our societies.

Obviously, workers' education more than before now has a particularly critical role to play by providing knowledge and information that the working class people need in order to cope with the changing institutional, structural and technological conditions of the world of work. Thus, in this process, making the role of workers' education in our nations and throughout the world assumes greater and greater importance. Therefore, it is evident that providing equitable educational opportunities for all categories of the working class implies the need to provide relevant educational content and a decent educational atmosphere in all other aspects of life essential skills. Kester (2002) then, avers "this is to bridge the existing educational gap created by the ever rapidly changing world of globalization."

It is pertinent to note that at present, in most organization in Nigeria, the emphasis is on workers' education that would teach the workers how to be dutiful, more productive, obey instructions and cheerful in undertaking the task entrusted to them by their employer(s) without asking questions. Often, an average working class citizen is grossly deprived of many educational opportunities available for advancing his/her general knowledge by the circumstances of employment status and some unwholesome organizational culture and policy(ies). This is because poverty coupled with the state of the nation's economy render workers

weak and vulnerable to the whims and caprices of the employer. Given this circumstances, an average working class citizen in Nigeria is a disadvantaged one, who should be called up for nothing except to do his/her daily chores of duty at the mercy and wish of employers.

The EFA goals, as they relate to workers' education recommend that all qualitative learning needs of all adults, either working or not; should be met as a welcome development. However, meeting these qualitative learning needs of young and adults who constitutes the active labour force of the country comes in two folds. Achieving 50% literacy improvement of those with no initial basic education by 2015 on one hand and on the other, ensuring equitable access to qualitative continuing education for those who by employment circumstances are out of the "regular schooling."

Consequently and indeed, workers' education needs within the EFA goals should focus on workers' education programme that is more than just a part-time activity to keep the working class citizen busy. It should be an untapped part of any satisfactory strategic programme for socio-economic development as well as means for the improvement of the lives of the working people and not really an end in itself (Poloni, 1991).

Workers' education as planned by EFA programme of agenda should therefore, ensure that the rank-and-file of the workers at various levels of the organizational hierarchy understand their position and their rights as well as the various problems facing them, their organization and their different environments within and outside the workplace. It should be an educational activity that gradually transforms the individual personalities and knowledge in each way that every individual worker is able to effectively and efficiently undertaken his/her constantly changing responsibilities, challenges and roles either within or outside the world of work. At the same time, it should provide for a programme which will extensively prepare the individual adult worker to compete favourably with any worker from other part of the world. Thus, making an average

Nigerian worker an international worker within the global context of the changing world of work.

Given the background that the individual worker differ greatly in their backgrounds, their capacities and their motivations; achieving such an egalitarian workers' education within the context of EFA goals by 2015, requires a great harmonization and consideration of all needs and aspirations of all the working class citizens in the country. This is with the intention of eliminating barriers to learning and participation so as to make effective the right education and in particular workers' education), to equal opportunities and participation (Kester, 2002). However, equality of qualitative workers' education opportunity by 2015 may be achieved most readily when such programme agenda or framework provide conditions, which enable each working class citizen to develop his/her full potentials within a group dynamics.

Therefore, Fasokun (2007) opines that equality of qualitative workers' education for all working class citizen by 2015 in Nigeria is achievable when the programme framework attends to the following:

a. reflects the diversity of those present in the learning activity itself in the curriculum and pedagogical/andragogical style;

b. attend to the wider and immediate institutional contexts in which the participants work and live; and

c. in some ways reflect the changing needs of an increasingly diverse society.

The Study Circle and Workers' Education

The study circle is a form of public fora for bringing citizens together in a highly participating, highly deliberative format for the discussion of pressing public issues. Suffice it to say that both public fora and study circles can be used interchangeably but the only thing is that the study circle connote a smaller public forum. According to Uddman (1989) it is a circle of friends or associates assembled for common and planned studies of a predetermined subject or problem area. In its traditional form, the

circle members has 20 hours for the entire study; meet three times per week for not more than 3 hours per session contact. At each weekly meeting the members must not be less than 5 and not more than 20 including the leader. Although, the study circle is being found all over the world today, it has long being an important instrument of popular education among the Swedish people.

This dialogic educational method grew under the inspiration of an international exchange of ideas in the Swedish countries of Norway, Denmark and Finland, and to some extent in Tanzania and other African countries associated with the cooperative movements (Uddman, 1989).

The study circle places emphasis on the individual within the group rather than the teacher (or leader). It is a circle of culture (or friendship) where the paternalism and authoritarianism attributes of the traditional method of teaching are questioned. The basic belief is that the traditional classroom situation domesticates the learners by offending their individual freedom and autonomy in the learning process. Thus, the traditional teaching method is seen as submerging the consciousness of the learner(s) because they are not involved in the real act of knowing. They are only given a ready-made view of social reality.

The study circle therefore, is a social activity of conscientisation in which members of the group communicate through extensive dialogue with others to determine how they can collectively change their conditions and environments. Succinctly put, the dialogical situation is emphasized on "we think" and not "I think" because according to Paulo Friere it is "we think" that make it possible for the me to think as individuals. So the basic principle behind the study circle method is that the individual members of the circle "know that they know and know that they are able to change their situation and environments." It is a social process through which people in the same circumstances wish to achieve a social goal which needs to be achieved in cooperation with others. This is however done with trust, faith, humility, love and willingness to work together.

The introduction of study circle to workers' education begins with an investigation of a particular situation/issue/problem by providing the curriculum of problem(s) and issue(s) to be discussed in such learning process. And as a result of dialogue; members arrived at a decision to become involved in concrete actions to solve such problems. The use of this method therefore involves the usage of visual aids to dramatise various social or organisational issues to subsequently generate discretion over such among the members. In this dialogic educational process, each member begins to contribute freely in the analysed of the issue/problem and at providing solution to each.

In this process everybody learns. The method exhibits such existentialist features as pragmatism, problem posing and solving, liberalism freedom of the learners, intersubjectivity, authentic teacher-learner relationship and dialogic praxis.

The implication of the above is that learning in today's organisation must not be left to chance, where the individual employees are expected to pick-up behaviour, attitudes and skills informally. Every organisation should endeavour to encourage employees to form study circle with members not less than 5 and not more than 10 (and in big organisation not more than 20). Such study circle should also be encourage to meet at least once a week during lunch time or often days work or even during weekends at designated venues which may include members residence. However, weekly, a central theme or topic is selected for discussion across all the study circles in the organisation.

The adoption of study circle in Nigeria will definitely help to turn our organisation into learning organisations. Learning organisations are organisation where the individual employee continually expand their capacity to create an atmosphere where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, and where employees are continually provided with learning opportunities; so as to use learning to reach their goals; foster inquiries and dialogue. Learning organisations are organisations where it

is safe for the employees to share information openly and take collective risk(s) as a group.

In furtherance to this, the use of study circles will help to teach Nigerian organisation as corporate entity to begin to utilize these individual learning opportunities created in the employees. Utilizing the individual learning opportunities for the benefits of the corporate entity take us to what is known as 'organisational learning.' It is a process when the focus of learning is gradually shifted from the individual employees to the totality of the employees in such a way that the learning system does not only influence immediate members but also future employees (Fiol and Lyles, 1985). Therefore organisational learning could be seen as an aggregate utilization of the broad skills and knowledge acquired by the totality of the employees to achieve an over all efficiency and effectiveness for the organisation. Dodgson (1993) describes organisational learning as "the way firms build, supplement, and organise knowledge and routines around their activities and within their cultures and adapt and develop organisational efficiency by improving the use of the broad skills of their workforce."

It is pertinent to note that the introduction of study circle for the working class citizens does not in any way limits itself to the management. If most management cannot or are not willing to start, the industrial unions should, as it is done by the international union of Bricklayers and Allied craftworkers in North American in the mid–1980s. (Oliver, 2002). It was on record that the international union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers in North America did adopt the study circle model in the rank-and-file members' discussion of its major planning document for a comprehensive re-examination of all facets of the union. Subsequently, several major union also adopted the study circle to ensure "union voice" in the management and organisation of their unions.

According to Oliver, specifically in 1996, the World Bank developed an internal study circle series for its employees, "people and participation:

New partnerships for the 21st Century." The World Bank designed these series of study circle to encourage the staff to openly express their views about the Bank's policies, philosophy and programmes.

The adoption of study circle by Nigerian's organisations would obvious be significant for organisational change and to ensure employees participation in organisational decision-making. Oliver (2002:41) buttressing the significance of the study circle to the organisation avers:

> once an organisation takes on the sponsorship of a study circle series, for its members or for the public, the organisation itself is changed. Opening up the decision-making process, seeking counsel outside the organisational hierarchy, and acting on the member's views, can change the organisational culture. While organisation-sponsored study circles have meaning for the organisation, they also have meaning for the member or constitutively who, through the process of study circle participation, funds raise in organisational affairs, which can carry over to public life... once an individual acquires the capacity and confidence for informed participation, this can never again be denied of him/her, either in the organisation or in public life.

Experiences all over the world have shown that the adoption of study circle will help to expand workers' education in achieving qualitative continuing education for the working class citizens in Nigeria by 2015 for the following advantages:

- Study circles encourage diversity in participation because they are safe settings to open-up to divergent views.
- Study circle is democracy in action because everyone has an equal voice.
- Study circles have low-budget education fora that can be held in diverse settings.
- Study circles are participants and group-directed not mandated by a few.

- Study circles offer face-to-face dialogue that breaks down communication barriers and enhances collaborative problem-solving efforts.
- Study circles build communication between the employees and the management.

The above benefits of the study circle notwithstanding; it is noteworthy to say that individuals and organisations differ greatly in their backgrounds, their capacities and their motivations. Hence, formation of study circle may not produce the same effect in every industry. The same curriculum, guidance and instruction may not be appropriate for every study circle even in the same industry. In a situation like this, full realization of equality of educational opportunity for every working class under the study circle model shall involve some fundamental basic steps. The following steps can be used to guide the formation of the study circles:

Step I: Watching video clips to initiate dialogue on predetermine organisational issue/problem. This is the codification stage where the individual begin to give meaning to the theme(s) of discussion.

Step II: Members begin to select salient issues arising from the watched video film(s). The members are encourages to choose issues that are most charged with existential and relevant meaning to them. The issue (or sub topic) selected must have major emotional generative content; such that the can allow the members to move from simple issues to complex ones.

Step III: Motivational sessions that promote both mental and emotional situation for the members of each study circle on the selected issue(s). The thinking, aspirations and problems are discussed extensively through informal conversations.

Step IV: Specific outcomes or decision are arrived at from the dialogue. These are expected to find and implement solutions to thorny issues or problems; other result in task forces for further study.

Conclusion

Once a study circle ends, whatever the outcome, there is the need to ensure sustenance by encouraging the members to continue to come together to discuss not only organisational policy issues but other public policy actions. The circle culture should be built into the psyche of an average Nigerian to ensure a sustained voice in governance at all level of our National Life. Therefore, sustaining the study circles require some degree of institutionalization of the dialogic process which in turn requires integration of the study circle model with the philosophy, mission and programmes of every organisation and government decision-making bodies.

Thus, regardless of the challenges, it must be very clear that any employee or citizen who lacks the necessary skill and knowledge before being assigned to a particular responsibility will surely lack the necessary confidence with which to carry out the job, and effectiveness to do it. On this basis, every organisation, government, trade union should therefore strive to promote an environment that will help the working class citizens to grow into some responsible and more productive workforce through systematic acquisition of skills and knowledge for both corporate and industrial development.

The major responsibility of parties in industrial relations is to provide a climate where the working class citizens regardless of their perceived differences, have equal opportunity to learn and develop their potentials. Given the fact that the working class citizens are the engine-room for national development; the government, private employers of labour and the trade union movements must take the initiative in promoting the benefits of diversity and providing an inclusive fora for industrial and national development. For qualitative continuing education for every adult

by 2015 to become a reality; it is important for government, employers and unions to establish both short and long term learning goals using the study circle culture in order to promote industrial inclusiveness.

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