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REFOCUSING ADULT EDUCATION IN CONFORMITY WITH FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES OF MODERN REALTIES

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Abstract

The growing importance of adult education as a major instrument for achieving sustainable lifelong learning in various spheres of human endeavours have led to fundamental changes in its structure and tenets. Based on these changes, this paper, therefore, provided a strong justification for refocusing the structures and tenets of adult education in conformity with fundamental changes of modern realities. The paper began with a critical dissection of the cardinal areas where fundamental changes have occurred in adult education. Such areas include: the new understanding and definitions of adult education, the new roles and objectives of Adult Education, the expanded components of Adult Education, the expanded philosophical approach of adult education, the expanded learning environment (ELE), the expanded views of the rationale behind educating them, and the expanded perceptions of the commonly accepted beliefs regarding adult education. The paper was concluded with some recommendations on the strategies for reshaping the structures and tenets of adult education in Nigeria in order to make the discipline conforms to these documented changes.

Key Words: Structures, tenets, adult education, fundamental changes, and modern realities.

Introduction

The word Education is derived from the Latin word *educere*, meaning to draw out or evoke something that is hidden or latent in people. Therefore, education is planned learning (Spencer & Lange, 2014).

Applying the meaning of education to the context of adult education imperatively connotes “to draw out or evoke something that is hidden or latent in the adults”. Thus, adult education is a planned learning for the adults. Therefore, the first structure and tenet of adult education is a planned learning activity. One of the early impetuses for adult education was provided in the 1919 report findings on adult education by the British Ministry of Reconstruction which defined adult education as “all the deliberate efforts by which men and women attempt to satisfy their thirst for knowledge, to equip themselves for their responsibilities as citizens and members of society, or to find opportunities for self-expression.”

The report findings argued that the impetus for the adult education platform should be to liberate, with a focus on “education for life”, not just “for livelihood” while its goals include personal enlightenment, active citizenship, and the promotion of democratic society (Spencer & Lange, 2014). Adult education, therefore, emerged in response to widespread concerns of isolation, poverty, exploitation and it was strengthened by a common purpose which gained the momentum needed to bring about individual and social change. It was on this basis that Selman and Dampier (1998) referred to adult education as a “movement”. The adult education movement has expanded tremendously, over the years, with those working in the field characterising their work as human resource training, or as workplace learning or as professional development (Spencer & Lange, 2014). The early defining principles and practices of adult education have undergone several iterations, in terms of structures and tenets, through the years, with such iterations encompassing a much broader scope. This paper, therefore, examined the changing nature of these iterations with a view of justifying and proposing the need for reshaping the structures and tenets of adult education in conformity with the fundamental changes associated with it.

Fundamental Changes in Adult Education

Over the years, adult education has passed through fundamental changes in many aspects of its structures and tenets. This is evident, historically, from the international conferences held on adult

education starting from that of Albert Mansbridge held in 1929 to the various UNESCO organised conferences, with the last held in the city of Belem, Brazil in 2009. There were fundamental changes in the theme, sub-themes, aims, attendance, agenda, and decisions of each conference. In recent time, other important issues have arisen and brought fundamental changes to adult education. These issues are thoroughly discussed below:

1. The Emerging new understanding and definitions of Adult Education

Adult education, in the early 60s, was considered as “an activity with educational purposes carried on by people who are engaged in the ordinary business of life” (Bryson, 1936). The UNESCO Elsinore Conference of 1949 contended that adult education is “designed to aid and foster movements which aim at creating a common culture to end the opposition between the so-called masses and the so-called élite”. The UNESCO Montreal Conference of 1960 concluded that adult education covers literacy and technical education and the processes of schooling for adults lacking access to continuing education, or mainly remedial (e.g. adult literacy for those who had missed normal schooling), or a rather narrow vocational training serving largely economic needs, or a second-chance opportunity for illiterate adults to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skill.

However, in modern times, these narrow and less definite understandings and perceptions of adult education have fundamentally changed to embrace the realities of contemporary human existence as observed in the views of (Merriam and Brockett, 2007) that “modern adult education practice requires adults to engage in systematic and sustained learning activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, or values”.

Today, adult education is increasingly viewed as an important tool to tackle social and economic inequality, reduce poverty, prepare global society for new paradigms of sustainable production and consumption, train skilled labour for competitive economies, create the basis for a culture of peace and conviviality, establish more harmonious relationships between human and natural environments, and develop the potential of all people (UNESCO,

2009). Adult Education is now considered as “a fundamental human right for the achievement of equity and inclusion, for alleviating poverty and for building equitable, tolerant, sustainable and knowledge-based societies” (UNESCO, 2011).

Adult education is also perceived “as a means to achieve social justice and educational equality” (UNESCO, Paris Conference, 1985), “a significant component of the humanistic perspective of lifelong learning” (UIL, 2014; UNESCO, 2011), and “a major building block of a learning society for the creation of learning communities, cities and regions as they foster a culture of learning throughout life and revitalize learning in families, communities and other learning spaces, and in the workplace” (UNESCO 2015).

In another UNESCO Declaration (2015), Adult education is conceptualised as “including education and learning opportunities for active citizenship, variously known as community, popular or liberal education”. “It empowers people to actively engage with social issues such as poverty, gender, intergenerational solidarity, social mobility, justice, equity, exclusion, violence, unemployment, environmental protection and climate change”. “It also helps people to lead a decent life, in terms of health and well-being, culture, spirituality and in all other ways that contribute to personal development and dignity”.

The new understanding and re-definition of adult education was well captured at the UNESCO 5th International Conference on Adult Education held in Hamburg, Germany, popularly called the ‘Hamburg Declaration’ in 1997. In the conference, adult education was seen as:

The key to the twenty-first century; it is both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society. It is a powerful concept for fostering sustainable development, for promoting democracy, justice, gender equity, and scientific, social and economic development, and for building a world in which violent conflict is replaced by dialogue and a culture of peace based on justice... (Hamburg Declaration para. 2).

This new understanding influenced UNESCO to provide a comprehensive definition of Adult Education in 2015, thus:

Adult learning and education is a core component of lifelong learning. It comprises all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes: formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live, develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities, organizations and societies (UNESCO and UIL, 2016, p. 6).

The continuous refinements in the definitions of adult education lend credence to the need to refocus the structures and the tenets of the discipline.

2. Shift in the roles and objectives of Adult Education

The emerging understanding and re-definitions of adult education have greatly and strongly influenced the new roles and objectives of adult education. The original intention of the objectives of adult education was rooted in societal aspirations, nation-building, and unification. However, over the years, there has been a paradigm shift from this intention to the individual and social purposes of adult education. This is well explained in the review of the functions of adult education by Selman and Dampier, (1998) when they identified four functions of adult education from the individual perspectives as vocational, social, recreational, and self-development.

However, Jarvis (2010) placed emphasis on social purpose function of adult education. He provided the list of the social purpose function of adult education as:

- To maintain the social system and reproduce existing social relations
- To transmit knowledge and reproduce culture
- For individual advancement and selection

- To provide for leisure time pursuit and institutional expansion
- To further development and liberation

Similarly, Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) combined the individual and social functions of adult education with more emphasis on the individual element in the list provided:

- Cultivation of the intellect
- Individual self-actualization
- Personal and social improvement
- Social transformation
- Organizational effectiveness

Similarly, in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the new aims, roles, and objectives of adult education were succinctly identified by UNESCO and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2016, p. 8) thus, to:

- (i) Equip people with the necessary capabilities to exercise and realize their rights and take control of their destinies.
- (ii) Promote personal and professional development, thereby supporting more active engagement by adults with their societies, communities and environments. It fosters sustainable and inclusive economic growth and decent work prospects for individuals. It is therefore a crucial tool in alleviating poverty, improving health and well-being and contributing to sustainable learning societies.
- (iii) Develop the capacity of individuals to think critically and to act with autonomy and a sense of responsibility.
- (iv) Reinforce the capacity to deal with and shape the developments taking place in the economy and the world of work.
- (v) Contribute to the creation of a learning society where every individual has an opportunity to learn and fully participate in sustainable development processes and to enhance solidarity among people and communities.
- (vi) Promote peaceful coexistence and human rights.
- (vii) Fosters resilience in young and older adults.

These new aims, roles and objectives of adult education provide the justification to refocus the structures and tenets of the discipline.

3. Shift in the components of Adult Education

In recent past, bulk of adult education programmes focused on literacy and numeracy in its various dimensions. However, in recent time, though literacy and numeracy are still considered as fundamental aspects of adult education, new components have emerged due to the expanding scope of the conceptualisations of adult education. For example, adult education is considered as “agenda for the future”; “a powerful concept for fostering sustainable development, for promoting democracy, justice, gender equity, and scientific, social and economic development, and for building a world in which violent conflict is replaced by dialogue and a culture of peace based on justice” (UNESCO 1997).

This implies that the components of adult education cover sustainable development, democracy, justice, gender equity, conflict resolution, and peace promotion, among others. Similarly, the consideration of adult education as “imperative for the achievement of equity and inclusion, for alleviating poverty, and for building equitable, tolerant, sustainable and knowledge-based societies” (UNESCO, 2010) reflects the fact that the components of adult education is increasingly being expanded in the modern conceptualisations of the discipline. In essence, adult education, in modern times, is conceptually recognised as very rich, multi-referenced, multi-disciplinary, and multi-dimensional in nature.

Besides, the recognition of adult education as “an important tool to tackle social and economic inequality, reduce poverty, prepare global society for new paradigms of sustainable production and consumption, train skilled labour for competitive economies, create the basis for a culture of peace and conviviality, establish more harmonious relationships between human and natural environments, and develop the potential of all people (UNESCO, 2009) implies that the components of adult education extends to poverty reduction, up-skilling or reskilling of workers, human and natural symbiotic relationships, and development of people’s

potentials irrespective of the age factor. In essence, the components of adult education, in modern realities, cover the entire activities of mankind.

The expanding components of adult education provide the justification to refocus the structures and tenets of the discipline.

4. Shift in the philosophical approach of adult education

One method for identifying the purposes of adult education is the use of a philosophical approach. Therefore, the philosophical approach for the identification of the purposes of adult education has historically and fundamentally changed. For example, at the emergence of adult education, the philosophical approach was based on liberal philosophy (the love of learning and the development of intellectual powers of rational discussion). However, over the years, the philosophical approach has changed to that of consciousness-raising, empowerment, and social change. Elias and Merriam (2005) identified the historical progression of the philosophies of adult education from the beginning to now as follows:

- (i) Liberal philosophy of adult education** emphasises a concern mainly with the liberal arts and a “love of learning” and the development of intellectual powers of logic and rational discussion. The main goal of the liberal philosophy is to liberate the power of the human mind and the acquisition of wisdom while the role is to develop the rational and moral powers of learners.
- (ii) Progressive philosophy of adult education** encompasses other origins of learning such as experience, feelings, and curiosity, rather than just reason, as part of its learner-centred approach. This philosophy views education as a social activity and should serve the purpose of social reform. The focus is on granting access to learning particularly in the areas of science, problem-solving, and new technologies, for all learners. In most parts of the world, this philosophy has been the driving force and most impactful on adult education.
- (iii) Behavioural philosophy of adult education** has been linked to skills training, planning and evaluation. With a focus

on observable and measurable behaviour, it is a competency based approach. Based upon the premise of human motivation being linked to the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain principle; the belief is that learning can be molded according to the nature of the stimulus used.

- (iv) **Humanistic philosophy of adult education** focuses on individual creativity and autonomy. The freedom and dignity of humans are considered sacred. This approach is highly “person-centred” in the way learners are supported in their quest for personal meaning and self-actualisation. Often associated with self-directed learning, it is often the favoured approach of those within human resource development and has been highly influential in the field of adult education.
- (v) **Radical philosophy of adult education** views adult education as a vehicle for consciousness-raising, empowerment, and social change. Adult Education has passed from the stages of serving purely cultural ends, through that of being merely tools for national development, to that of socio-political liberation and emancipation of individuals and classes from all forms of oppression. This last stage of adult education has led to the increased call from scholars for radical changes in the conceptions, objectives, and methodologies of the discipline. The arch advocates of this trend are Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich, and Everett Reimer. Challenging injustices and lack of freedom as well as the promotion of social transformation, social justice, environmental sustainability, and democracy are the cornerstones of the radical philosophy. Thus, learners are encouraged to conduct social analyses to better understand their position in society and recognise how and where power is located.
- (vi) **Analytical philosophy of adult education** focuses on careful analysis of the words, concepts, metaphors, and principles commonly used in adult education and how the language and the associated values shape practice. It views the goals of adult education in terms of function; especially the effect on the adult educator and the benefit to the learner, with less thought about social significance.

(vii) Postmodernism philosophy of adult education

analyses the fundamental principles of the modern age, handed down from the period of Enlightenment such as: power to establish universal truth, sureness of knowledge, pre-determination of growth, the opportunity for complete coherence, and other theories that strive to clarify societal patterns in a universal approach. It is intended to deconstruct and shed light on the vagueness and decentralisation of the information. The goals of Postmodernism are freedom, justice and emancipation.

The changing nature of the philosophical approaches of adult education demands the need to refocus the structures and the tenets of the discipline.

5. Shift in the research approaches in adult education

In the context of planning and development of research, the most significant aspect lies in its quality and not in quantity. There is, therefore, the need for researchers to pay due attention to designing and adhering to the appropriate methodology for improving the quality of research. Two distinct research approaches exist in literature; they are: positivism and interpretivism. The belief of the positivistic researchers is that the social world consists of concrete and unchangeable reality which can be objectively quantified. Whereas, the interpretivist researchers oppose the positivistic belief of reality and argue that, instead, the reality is socially constructed by the humans which can be changed and understood subjectively (Corbetta, 2003; Marcon and Gopal, 2005; Kroeze, 2012).

For the first half of the twentieth century, the positivist model was dominant in adult education research by giving importance of using standardised tests and systematic observations, experiments, survey data, and statistical analysis. In other words, the quantitative research method was quite powerful. However, after the 1960s, due to the influence of Kuhn's work, the new approaches—such as, symbolic interactionism, ethnography, critical research, feminist, phenomenography, discourse analysis and other forms—came up into practice (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012).

In other world, there was a shift of research methods from quantitative to qualitative, and the superiority of quantitative research in adult education began to wane. The growth of qualitative research was also from the unhappiness with the process of generating knowledge within the positivistic research (Sandberg, 2005). Alongside the research methods and approaches, ethical considerations were also introduced in the research world though it was subjected to research methods and approaches.

The limitations or disadvantages of quantitative research led to the emergence of qualitative research. Some of these limitations include: quantitative research leaves out the common meanings of social phenomenon as it fails to ascertain deeper underlying meanings and explanations (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998); it cannot account for how social reality is shaped and maintained, or how people interpret their actions and others (Blaikie, 2007); as well as it overlooks the respondents' experiences and perspectives in highly controlled settings because it lacks a direct connection between researchers and the participants when collecting data (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Walker, 2013).

Qualitative research means "any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It can refer to research about persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings as well as organisational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This means that qualitative research is not statistical and it incorporates multiple realities. Flick (2014) claimed that qualitative research is "interested in analysing subjective meaning or the social production of issues, events, or practices by collecting non-standardised data and analysing texts and images rather than number and statistics". This claim stressed how people make sense of something in the world. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2011) claimed that qualitative research is "multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter".

The advantages inherent in the use of qualitative research in adult education have been documented in literature. First, qualitative research approach produces the thick and detailed description of

participants' feelings, opinions, and experiences and interprets the meanings of their actions (Denzin, 1989); second, it has abilities to understand different people's voices, meanings and events (Richardson, 2012); and lastly, it allows researchers to discover the participants' inner experience and to figure out how meanings are shaped (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The paradigm shift in the research methodology of adult education from quantitative to qualitative has also necessitated the need to refocus the structures and the tenets of the discipline.

6. Expanded learning environment through the application of ICT in adult education

As much today as in the past, knowledge acquisition as well as the process of dissemination is dominated by a physical human presence in a socio-spatial environment. However, this process, largely dominated by the analog learning environment, is increasing getting into expanded learning environment with information and communication technology, especially the Internet and the digital media. Expanded learning environment (ELE) is fast becoming the core concept of adult educational approach which focuses on the linking of analog and virtual learning models and learning practices. The basic idea is based on the concept that learning, with the support of the Internet, opens the predominantly closed classical teaching culture, and does this to the benefit of learners by spatially enhancing content and expanding the social sphere.

The advantages of the ELE in adult education include:

1. Increase in places of learning

In the classical teaching culture, the closed space greatly defines the learning setting (school building, classroom, training room). In contrast to that, the World Wide Web offers the possibility of increasing learning sites to all the places where a good network connection is available (WLAN, WiFi). This can be in classrooms (as before), in workplaces, or living rooms/homes, cafés, clubs, or even the so called "co-learning spaces". The latter are decentralised learning places in which learning communities meet in order to get connected to the web from there. This expansion is supported and

promoted through the use of mobile devices (tablets, smartphones) that enable cable-free access to the world of knowledge.

2. Extension of learning times

With ELE, learning has been made highly flexible with people learning the same thing at different times. The ELE model combines the synchronous “simultaneous” learning of analog learning settings with web-based, asynchronous teaching blocks. Video tutorials, audio files or recorded learning dialogues can equalise learning time and content and make it more readily and easily available. For example, the communication of instrumental knowledge by facilitators in adult education programme, still a core task of analog teaching, is presented in short video clips. The content is provided to learners over the net. The appropriation of the learning content is customised to their own life and their own learning preferences (i.e. at home or at work and potentially at any time of the day). Exchanges over learning content with other learners is conveyed through chats or learning forums. Thus, the learners come prepared into the analog synchronous lesson.

3. Expansion of the learning content and learning pathways

With ELE, learners can connect to a large pool of knowledge with digital technologies and digital archives or repositories. There are more extensive knowledge assets which are available through open, freely accessible websites (Open Access). Through this, learning on the net is provided with a license which allows the teaching materials to be freely stored/reproduced, used, processed, mixed and distributed. In this way, an adaption of learning materials to individual learning pathways is well-supported.

4. Extension of the roles of learning involved

Expanded Learning Environment invites learners, more than ever, to take on the role of the knowledge producer, the input-giver and the learning- designer. In this model, learners act like “part-givers” who can control a part of their learning pathway themselves: they can find and create learning modules on the net and in the analog world,

implement them in group work, independently develop course topics and tasks, and take responsibility for their personal learning progress. To take these roles requires active practice and experimentation. In this model, facilitators act like a learning companion.

5. “Glocality” of learning and of learners

From the description of the digitalisation of learning, it is clear that the production of knowledge is increasingly less tied to a specific place. Extended learning settings promote the socio-spatial networks of learners from the classroom outwards. For example, if one is interested in the literacy practices of other lands, one can get in touch with the organisers and beneficiaries from around the world with the help of video chats. With Google Maps, one can see how such practices really look-like at specific different locations. In workshops, we can invite local experts and simultaneously tap into the arsenals of the global online. Through web-based networking, like-minded people find specific common learning interests and can thus cooperatively develop their skills further. Such networking can work at the local, regional as well as at the global level. This is termed “Glocality of learning”.

Adult education, in the world of today, is being increasingly “technologically driven”. This is why the basis for all actions on adult education has been the review of the adult education objectives, structures, and tenets which are increasingly being appropriately implemented with an extended or expanded learning setting for learners in a mainly analog learning environment.

7. New perceptions of the rationale behind educating them

In the past, the rationale for educating the adults was based on helping them to acquire basic skills of reading, writing, and numeracy in order to make them become functional in their daily lives. This is often considered a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity”. However, with fast changing nature of the world, the core principle of educating adults is now based on the conviction that learning should not be restricted to a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity”. Adults need more opportunities and support to learn throughout their lives,

whatever their circumstances. The world is constantly changing and learning helps many people to make the positive changes they need and broaden their intellectual horizons.

Thus, adults may need to be educated so as to catch up on the learning they missed out when they were younger in order to reach their potentials. They may need to be educated so as to enable individuals to tackle personal issues or circumstances and thus respond appropriately to changing circumstances, often unforeseen, so that they can find a new direction or cope better with change and transitions throughout life.

8. Shift in commonly accepted beliefs regarding adult education

Over the years, there have been fundamental changes in the commonly held and accepted terminologies and beliefs in adult education. These are: first, the perception of adult learners has expanded from those who want to catch up on learning they had missed or those who want to acquire basic skills of writing, reading, and numeracy to lifelong adult learners. Therefore, the adult learners, in the contemporary perception, are described in the following contexts:

- Someone who identifies a knowledge gap in his or her existence and wishes to fill the gap by enrolling in a learning programme.
- Someone who takes a second chance opportunity to learn.
- Someone who desires to update his or her existing level of knowledge.
- Someone who desires to keep abreast of happenings in his or her immediate environment and beyond.
- Someone who aspires for continued learning for self-actualisation.
- Someone who seeks a change in attitude and behaviour by enrolling in a learning programme.
- Someone who does not want to be left behind or becomes irrelevant in the ever changing and fast paced world.
- Someone whose urge and love for learning is insatiable.

- Someone who believes that learning is lifelong in nature, that learning does not have a beginning or an end.
- Someone who believes in the development of the intellectual power of the mind.
- Someone who strives for unconditional self-development

Second, there is a shift in the age criterion usually associated with beneficiaries of adult education programme. In the past, beneficiaries of adult education programmes are often thought of as adults who have advanced in age. However, in the modern realities, the age factor is no longer considered an issue in people's participation in adult education programmes. For example, in her recommendation of those who are qualified to participate in adult education programme, UNESCO (1994) considered adult education to "cover all organized educational activities provided for people ... who are generally fifteen years or older". The unique feature in the UNESCO consideration is that, any educational programme or activity organised for participants who are at least fifteen years is adult education in nature and such participants are adult learners. Third, the age long belief that adult education is characterised by voluntary participation of the learners and it is non-credential based is fast becoming outdated. Numerous adult education programmes are becoming mandatory for beneficiaries to attend in a lifelong learning world of today. Similarly, numerous adult education programmes are fast becoming certificated.

Fourth, "those who no longer attend school on a regular and full time basis" component in most earlier definitions of adult education to describe the beneficiaries of adult education programme (UNESCO, 1972, 1994) does not capture the modern description of beneficiaries of adult education programme. Everybody in today's world is a beneficiary of adult education. The underlisted categories of people are all into adult education and are classified as beneficiaries.

- a. Those who want to catch up on learning they had missed.
- b. Those who want to acquire new knowledge or skills.
- c. Those who want to increase their knowledge base, keep their brain active, and enjoy the challenge of learning new things.

- d. Those who want to learn something they had always been interested in.
- e. Those who want to learn for the sake of learning.
- f. Those who want to seek knowledge for its own sake and satisfy an inquiring mind.
- g. Those who engage in learning for personal advancement.
- h. Those who want to achieve higher status in a job, want to secure professional advancement and stay abreast of the competition.

Furthermore, new terminologies have found expression in different aspects of adult education as it has, over the years, acquired some new concepts and language. Adult educators now talk of 'conscientization' instead of 'enlightenment', 'animateur' or 'facilitator' for the 'teacher', 'dialogue' for 'teaching', 'popular education' for 'civic education', 'rural transformation' for 'rural development', and 'agricultural revolution' for 'agricultural extension'. These radical changes have implications for refocusing the structures and tenets of adult education. Besides, these changes have led to more difficult problem of acceptance and sponsorship of adult education programmes by most governments in the third world and other developing countries due to the suspicious belief that adult education enhances the liberation of the oppressed to fight the alleged oppressors.

Justifications for Reshaping the Structures and Tenets of Adult Education

The broad and complex challenges confronting humanity in modern world, occasioned by the influence of globalisation, have necessitated the need for people to acquire new information and knowledge as well as assess and change their assumptions of many phenomena. Thus, in the modern world people need to engage in both informational learning and transformative learning (Kokkos, 2014). The competencies required of adults in the modern world are daily expanding and have thus open up opportunities for further learning. Besides, many modern prevailing trends in adult education,

some of which were discussed above, provide the justification and the proposition for reshaping its structures and tenets

Recommendations for Reshaping the Structure and Tenets of Adult Education

1. New Focus for Adult Education

Adult education should be perceived more as a programme-designed than as an academic study based on contemporary definitions and conceptualisations of adult education as a powerful concept for fostering sustainable development, for promoting democracy, justice, gender equity, and scientific, social and economic development, and for building a world in which violent conflict is replaced by dialogue and a culture of peace based on justice. While not ruling out the importance of the academic study of adult education to guide programme designed, its new focus should be more of out-reach programmes which should be designed to reach diverse nature of people who feel a knowledge or skill gap(s) in their lives. The programmes can take any of the following forms: to create or increase people's awareness, to facilitate new knowledge acquisition or increase their knowledge base, to facilitate new skills acquisition or update their already possessed skills, to develop their competences to respond to challenges of life, or to engage people in systematic and sustained learning activities in order to achieve personal fulfilment. In other words, adult education should aim at making people become lifelong learners.

2. New Focus/Mission for Tertiary Adult Education Departments

The mission and mandate of tertiary adult education departments is usually focused on academic study of the discipline. Thus, students are usually produced by these departments and academically certificated as having theoretically met the requirements. However, most of these students cannot transfer the academically certificated knowledge into the practical designs of adult education programme(s). Therefore, adult education departments in tertiary institutions should have twin mandates of teaching adult education as an academic study as well as exposing students to real practical

design, planning, and implementation of adult education programmes. Students must be made, from second year to the final year, to design one adult education programme of their choice, with a clear specification of its vision and mission, implement the programme among the designated beneficiaries, and present a comprehensive report as part of the requirements for graduation.

3. New Focus for conducting research in adult education

Students, scholars, and others interested in conducting research in adult education should be encouraged and motivated to carry-out such research using more of qualitative approach than quantitative approach based on the inherent benefits and advantages of using the qualitative approach. One of the qualitative approaches to adopt is the action research which has been described as “an approach (not a fixed and closed model) through which control over the development and implementation of educational policies and programmes is given to the people concerned” (Alidou and Glanz, 2015). It is conceived as a means for practitioners and researchers to improve their practice. It is a process of systematic reflection, inquiry and testing which investigates what is being done and suggests how it might be improved by the ‘reflective practitioner’.

It is an inclusive way to expand knowledge that is at the direct and immediate service of practice. In action research, the knowledge of professionals, facilitators’ and learners is treated as equally important. It promotes a democratic and equitable approach to learning and helps to develop learning environments that empower adult learners to take part in shaping their education and learning. The principles inherent in all forms of action research include: “justice and democracy, the right of all people to speak and be heard, the right of each individual to show how and why they have given extra attention to their learning” (McNiff, 2002). These principles correspond to a rights-based, participatory approach to learning which is universally promoted.

4. Refocusing the commonly held beliefs in adult education

Some of the traditional commonly held beliefs in adult education need to be conceptualised to conform to modern day practice of adult education. For example, the voluntary participation characteristics associated with adult education belongs to the past as numerous adult education programmes are becoming mandatory for adult learners to participate in so as to enhance their capacities to transform their lives as lifelong learners. Similarly, the non-credential characteristics associated with adult education is becoming outdated because in the world of today, there are numerous adult education and training opportunities facilitated in various learning institutes and organisations that are credentialised while some are non-credentialised.

5. Refocusing the Mandate of NMEC

The National Commission of Adult and Non-Formal Education, also known as National Commission for Mass Education (NMEC), needs to expand its scope of mandate. Almost all the Commission's activities focus on literacy and vocational education even though mass education extends beyond these activities. Therefore, NMEC needs to live by its name-mass education-by extending its scope of activities to cover learning activities in other components associated with adult education in modern realities. To be more alive to its mandate, it is here suggested that the Commission's nomenclature should be changed to National Commission for Adult Learning and Education since adult learning covers any systematic and sustained learning activities, whether formal, non-formal, and informal, in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, or values.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed the fundamental changes that have occurred in the theory and practice of adult education over the years. It is pertinent to state that anybody involved in adult education, as a student, scholar, practitioner, or as a researcher, must have a deeper understanding and deepened insights of these fundamental changes in order to be abreast of the wider coverage of the discipline. The

continuous refinement and expansion in the conceptualisations, objectives, components, learning opportunities, philosophical approaches, research methodology, and commonly held beliefs and terminologies have tremendously enriched adult education as a dynamic and ever changing discipline.

UNESCO must be specially acknowledged for being in the forefront, championing these refinements and expansion. Other international development partners, that have been participating in UNESCO International Conferences on Adult Education, especially the fifth international conference held in Hamburg, Germany: FAO, ILO, UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNIDO, World Bank, WHO, Council of Europe, European Union, and OECD, deserved to be specially appreciated for identifying with and promoting adult education universally. Their active participation in the conference(s) and their massive contributions to the major decisions and resolutions have tremendously helped in advancing and harnessing the power and potential of adult education in the present world and in the viable future. The major decision that "a set amount of time should be devoted to adult education, everywhere and by everyone – 'one hour a day – one week a year'" changed the wrong, narrow, myopic, and fallacious perceptions often associated with adult education worldwide.

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