

Education for Fullness: The Role of Adult Education in Nigeria in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Education is very necessary for man in order to articulate himself and achieve fullness. But the formal system, which is elitist, discriminatory and instalmental, cannot alone provide all education one needs for self-fulfillment. The terminologies, such as, continuing education, recurrent education, education permanente and life-long education, have been used by different bodies to stress that education should be co-terminous with life. Adult education in its complementary and supplementary roles in education affords citizens of a country opportunities for attainment of self-fulfillment and fullness. Therefore, it is necessary that Nigeria should heighten efforts towards adult education in order to enable the citizens achieve self-fulfillment and fullness during the twenty-first century.

Introduction

Education is a necessity for survival of man. The concept education suggests development of valuable knowledge and skills in a society. Hence, O'Connor (1957:7) sees the educational system of any society as an elaborate social mechanism designed to bring about in the persons submitted to it certain skills and attitudes that are adjudged to be useful and desirable in the society. As a result of the necessity for education, there has been the view that one who ceases to learn ceases to exist although the one may be living. According to Freire (1974:3-4) to "exist" is more than to "live" because it means being in the world and at the same time with the world. Thus, one who exists has attributes of transcending, discerning, communicating and participating with others who are existing whereas one who is merely living does not possess these critical attributes. Therefore, one whose development of knowledge ceases has also stopped to exist, he is merely living.

Being conceived of as an enabling factor opening up many vistas of personal, community and national development, education is generally seen as a necessary investment. However, despite this realization, there is an erroneous conception of education by some people as a terminal apprenticeship for a working adult life. In Nigeria, despite the fact that in the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1998) a well-deserved chapter is assigned to Adult and Non-Formal Education, yet this sector has not been fairly treated in practice. Adults who take key decisions, and therefore hold the destinies of the country in their hands, should deserve continuous educational provisions in order to enable them grapple with the enormous problems on their shoulders. Hence the need for a re-orientation in the 21st century.

The thesis of this paper is that, education, as a necessity for human existence, should be a corollary of life. To do some justice to this assertion, we need, first, to have recourse to the conceptions of education by selected educational thinkers. Secondly, we have to demonstrate that education should be a corollary of life in order to achieve optimal disposal of knowledge for attainment of fullness of life.

Conceptions of Selected Thinkers

Plato who defines philosophy as the pursuit of intellectual culture (knowledge) maintains that knowledge is infallible unlike belief, which can be true or false. He says that knowledge enables one to perceive the world of essential features in contrast with the world of appearances. The realization made Plato to aver as quoted by Conford that:

Unless either philosophers become kings in their countries or those who are now called kings and rulers in their countries come to be sufficiently inspired with a genuine desire for wisdom, unless political power and philosophy meet together... there can be no rest from troubles... for states... nor yet for all mankind (Conford, 1979:179-190)

Thus for Plato, it is education that can transform a ruler and make him be himself and be able to perceive clearly and rule wisely. Hence, he prescribes an elaborate system of education for his philosopher-kings in order for peace and stability to prevail while misjudgment will be prevented.

Amos Comenius (1592-1670), realizing the need for education for all advocated universal knowledge or pansophism. He emphasizes that:

Our first wish is that all men should be educated to full humanity, not only one individual, nor a few nor many, but all men together and singly, young and old, rich and poor, of high and low birth, men and women - in a word, all whose fate is to be born human beings: so that at last the whole of the human race may become educated, men of all ages, all conditions, both sexes and all nations... Just as the whole world is a school for the whole of the human race... from the cradle to the grave.... Every age is destined for learning, nor is man given other goals in learning than in life itself (Comenius, 1957:97).

In the Panpedia, which was his last work in education, he argues that all should be educated and that education should be a corollary of life.

Dewey (1859-1952) defines education as a continuous reconstruction or re-organisation of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience (Dewey, 1916). Dewey also observes that active habits involve thought, invention, and initiative in applying capacities to new aims, as opposed to routine which marks an arrest of growth. As growth is the

characteristics of life, to Dewey education is all one with growing, it has no end beyond itself. That is, education should be a continuous process. Consequently, the value of the formal school constitutes in the extent to which it creates a desire for continued growth and supplies the means to make the desire realizable. On the whole, Dewey sees education as a necessary instrument for man's actualization of himself and as a lifelong process. Rusk (1969:326) has commended Dewey for challenging the old "static" cold-storage ideal of knowledge'. That is, that knowledge should be continuously renewed and up-dated so as to enable man tackle problems of life.

Also, Freire (1972a, 1972b and 1974), in his conscientization model of education advocates raising critical consciousness in adults so that they will be able to perceive their existential realities and take action towards remedying the situations. Education for adults should, in both content and methodology be an instrument of equipping students to adequately grapple with the issuing problems of existence and recreating the situations through action and reflection emanating from the lethargy and alienation characteristic of the Brazilians during the sixties. Freire (1974) sees "education as the practice of Freedom". He therefore observes that:

The education our situation demanded would enable men to discuss courageously the problems of their context-and to intervene in that context; it would warn men of the dangers of the time and offer them the confidence and the strength to confront those dangers instead of surrendering their sense of self through submission to the decisions of others. By predisposing men to re-evaluate constantly, to analyze "findings," to adopt scientific methods and processes, and to perceive themselves in dialectical relationship with their social reality, that education could help men assume an increasingly critical attitude towards the world and so to transform it (Freire, 1974: 33-34).

Thus, Freire whose concentrations were mainly on adult literacy and agricultural extension education sees the essence of adult education as constituted in the extent to which it enables the adults to grapple with their existential problems.

Like Freire, Nyerere (1979:49-52) who advocates education for self-reliance sees education as development. To Nyerere development is transformative in that education develops man who transforms his society.

In this views highlighted above, education is conceived of as a necessity for making man to realize himself and effectively exist in the society.

Education is Co-terminous with Life

Education should be seen as a continuum and this necessitates redefinition of the role of formal education. Formal education should not be seen as a knowledge filling station to which the young come in order to get their supply of knowledge and skills which will serve them for the rest of their lives (Richmond, 1979:67). Man is

biologically and physically unfinished requiring his life to be an unending process of completion and learning. Thus, one's personality is constituted from a complex of biological, physiological, geographical, cultural, sociological, economic and professional data, which differ from other individuals. Faure et al (1972:156), rightly observe that, physical, intellectual, emotional and ethical integration of the individual into a complete man is a broad definition of the fundamental aim for education.

Jones (1974:46) has argued that knowledge is socially grounded, and that a large part of it arises from the simple fact of living over a total lifetime, hence emphasis should be placed on individual having full participation in knowledge process in the society. Also, he argues that if knowledge is firmly set in a context of social interaction then life should become a process of continuing negotiations through which open access to knowledge resources in a society is gained. It needs to be added that the extent to which one could be described as being knowledgeable depends on his personality which is characterized by his exhibition of fullness at any point in time.

The implication of the foregoing is that, the idea of acquiring, at only a particular stage, a set of intellectual or technical equipment valid for a lifetime is out of date. This accentuates the need for a new conception of education as learning to live, learning to learn, so as to be able to absorb new knowledge all through life; learning to think freely and critically so as to enable man to be himself and attain fullness (Faure et al. 1972:69). According to Dewey, as one acts or interacts with his environment he acquires knowledge which he uses for subsequent actions. Education should necessarily equip one to organize every reality into action and thought. Or, in the Freirean sense, man as a being of praxis, education should make him to act and reflect over his environment.

The realization of the need for educational provisions throughout life has led different bodies to coin out different terms for it. These include, continuing education, recurrent education, education permanente and lifelong education. Each of these terms could be used interchangeably with others. However, there could be some special emphasis between one and another. For instance, all agree that education should be a cafeteria system where the appetite of everybody should be catered for at any point in time, be it for intellectual, vocational or recreational purposes. Continuing education emphasizes more on the provisions for any purpose after the cessation of the formal schooling. Recurrent education, on the other hand, is a conception of the optimum disposal of knowledge resources and learning facilities, for the maximum benefit of society (Houghton, 1974:6). But lifelong education, the background of which was laid by the report of the World Survey of Education Chaired by Edgar Faure (1972), includes all that other terms mean but emphasizes on the integration of formal, non-formal and informal educational provisions as each contributes to the overall educational acquisition by an individual. Some kernels of lifelong education emphasize, according to Cropley (1979:3), that education should:

1. Last the whole life of each individual;
2. Lead to the systematic acquisition, renewal, upgrading and completion of knowledge, skills, and attitudes made necessary by the constantly changing conditions in which people now live;
3. Have as its ultimate goal promotions of the self fulfillment of each individual;
4. Be dependent for its successful implementation on people's increasing ability and motivation to engage in self-directed learning activities;
5. Acknowledge the contribution of all available educational influence, including formal, non-formal and informal education.

Thus, lifelong education, as a principle and a master concept of education, focuses on the entire life span, the phenomenon of ever occurring change, attainment of self-fulfillment by man, and possession of skills and ability to acquire lifelong learning by every individual.

If we accept that lifelong education makes for achievement of self-fulfillment or fullness in people, our next question then is, what is the role of adult education. To this we turn next.

The Role of Adult Education

If we accept that education is an enabling factor, we need to ask ourselves whether it is just a pill that once taken perpetually immunizes one against ignorance. That is very far from the truth. For instance, if one goes through the formal system and attains a doctoral degree, the one has not attained all the education he needs, and may even relapse in his knowledge after some time. Hence, someone some time ago suggested that university graduates should be reviewing their degree certificates periodically in order to be sure that they know what they claim to know. This may look funny yet the fact remains that if one attains a university degree and stops learning, the one undoubtedly would relapse in his discipline.

The issue of adult education concerns the illiterates who have never been to school and different completers of the formal education at different levels. Every person no matter the level of education attained needs adult education of one type or another. Hence, adult education is basically defined as any education programme designed for people regarded as adults in their communities. That is, designed for people who are mentally mature and are socially responsible. For the illiterates, literacy education is designed so as to afford them some development for self-fulfillment through attainment of literacy skill. As noted by Faure et al (1972:141):

Obviously, when illiteracy is an aspect of under-development, literacy training should form an integral part of any development undertaking to help man to become a conscious agent and master of himself... Functional literacy aims at developing individuals' mental equipment and communicative powers, as well as their technical and vocational

capacities. It offers educative functions to broad sectors of society, promotes the formative part, which the major economic activities may play.

Thus, literacy education is a great means of integrating the illiterates with the communities of the literate world thereby helping them to communicate with both the living and the dead resulting in their attainment of self-fulfillment.

But literacy is just an aspect of adult education. The continuing aspect is as wide as the world itself. When people drop out of the formal system at whatever level, they should ideally drop into the adult education or non-formal education at an appropriate level. That is, on dropping out from any level, one continues his education through adult education.

For instance, in the National Policy on Education (NPE: 1998) the objectives of the Adult and Non-Formal Education section are: provision of literacy education for adults who have never had the advantage of any formal education; remedial education for those who prematurely dropped out of the formal school system; further of continuing education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills; in-service on-the-job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills; and, giving adult citizens necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment. As a matter of fact, these objectives are very comprehensive and laudable. If the objectives are fully implemented the country will be put on the right path of adult education for the benefit of adults in the country. However, adult education generally has not been fully backed up by the government over the years. Compared with other sectors it has not been fairly treated in financial allocations (Okedara, 1980:4-5; Osuji, 1984:8-9). Unfortunately, this ugly situation continues.

Also, it is very pertinent to refer to the Report of the Vision 2010 Committee (1997). The terms of reference of this August Committee included:

To set appropriate goals and targets and time frame for achieving our economic, political, social and cultural objectives and propose the strategies and the institutional arrangements required to attain the set goals and targets.

In spelling out the programmes of action on education, it is very unfortunate that adult education sector is not mentioned while primary, secondary and tertiary sectors are adequately mentioned. Only a very scanty mention is made for establishment of institutions of the status of secondary education institutions, to be linked with vocational schools, mass literacy and adult education for absorption of Junior Secondary School (JSS) 3 graduates (p.184). Even here it is not made clear whether the products will be used for mass literacy and adult education purposes. One wonders why the Committee should ignore adult education, which is very relevant to this term of reference.

It should be realized that while the formal system of education is selective, elitist and discriminatory, adult education takes care of a wider clientele and is non-discriminatory in any society. For instance, the formal system takes care of the youth in the perspective of the apprenticeship model of education, that is, education for preparing the youth for a working adult life. But adult education takes care of a person's whole life. It caters for educational aspirations of every adult at any point in time.

Among the characteristic features of adults include, mental maturity and social responsibility. It is through adult education, that adults are helped to be mentally articulate so as to be able to understand issues and judge rightly, and are enabled to perceive reality and creditably discharge their social roles as parents, uncles and leaders. For instance, mothers have to know the new responsibilities placed on them over the family from time to time. Fathers also should be made to understand their roles at any point in time as the changing socio-economic realities of their countries roll by. In Nigeria nowadays, there have been programmes organized for nursing mothers to intimate them with the need for breast-feeding, family planning and new approach to child bearing. Series of out-reach programmes are organized by different institutions through different strategies to bring to the knowledge of adults, men and women, the problems of and solutions to different diseases, such as cholera, tapeworm and hepatitis. Just name any issue which the adults need to be alerted of, they are reached through the face-to-face teaching approach, printed and electronic media. Thus, one could assert that the whole society has constituted schooling through which adults continuously learn to be themselves and attain fullness in all its ramifications. That is, in every section of the society, different and necessary education programmes are continuously offered to adults. This results in improved quality of life of which modern society is blessed with.

Thus, the role of adult education towards attainment of fullness and life fulfillment could be described in different ways. It could be conceived as a second chance or remedial to those who missed the opportunity for formal education. Here we have programmes, such as, literacy education for the illiterates and different continuing education programmes in forms of intellectual and vocational education. It could be describes as complementary or supplementary. Adult education plays a complementary role because it stabilizes one's educational attainment as it provides constant refinement of knowledge and skills. On the other hand, it plays a supplementary role as it takes over from where the formal system stops.

Another way of to conceive the role of adult education is in the context of horizontal and vertical dimensions. Vertically, at whatever age an adult finds himself, adult education is his companion as he interacts and gains experience. Horizontally, one's association with other people, either in the smaller or the wider society, adult education enables him to attain education non-formally. Thus, the totality of one's education is not to be seen only from the formal educational institutions he attended but many from the non-formal educational opportunities afforded him. Hence adult education could be seen as making continuous provisions for all the people within a society so as to make them up-to-date in their knowledge and skills, refine their thought and make them understand

issues and fully be in control of their destinies. Also, adult education at whatever level is engaged with the context, social, economic and political realities of its location. Duke (1994:309) has rightly put it that:

The dominant shared purpose of adult education has always been ameliorative. It has been intended to enhance individuals' life opportunities; to widen their horizons; to empower them; to alter the nature of the society of which they are... It is not, generally, seen as an end in itself.

As a result of the necessity of adult education for human and societal survival, Nigeria in the 21st century should offer different adult education programmes to cater for various educational aspirations. In this way, the citizens will be enabled to attain fullness of life through adult education.

Conclusion

Education is necessity for man in order to articulate himself and achieve fullness. But the formal system, which is elitist, discriminatory and installment, cannot alone help man to attain all education he needs for achievement of self-fulfillment. The terminologies, such as, continuing education, recurrent education, education permanente, and lifelong education, have been used by different bodies to stress that education should be co-terminous with life. To cater for the educational aspirations of all citizens of Nigeria, adult education plays a very important role. It provides for the interests of beneficiaries and the non-beneficiaries of the formal system. Thus adult education plays both complementary and supplementary roles in education in a country. Consequently, Nigeria should heighten efforts in adult education so as to afford citizens opportunities to attain self-fulfillment and fullness in the twenty-first century.

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