

## **Maslovian Theory of Human Needs: Implications for Adult Education Curriculum in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this paper is to probe the relevance of the Maslovian theory of hierarchy of human needs to adult education curriculum in Nigeria. A historical sketch of adult education curriculum in the country revealed congruence between contents of programmes and students' aspirations and vice versa. Therefore, to infest adult education curriculum in the country with the tenets of Maslow's theory, there should be a survey to ascertain the needs and interests of different categories of adults; provision for different interests; efficient and effective delivery machinery including units for monitoring achievements; and above all, efficient professionals capable of affording students opportunities to satisfy their needs and interests.

### **Introduction**

Human behaviour has since caught the attention of many psychologists. The concept of motivation has been identified as the driving force behind it. Many psychologists including Murray (1938) have theorized on motivation making the concept of need their focal point. All the formulations could be compressed into two viewpoints of need reduction and positive striving. The former view emphasizes on the need to satisfy basic physiological needs of hunger, thirst, sleep, and sexual appetite. Thus, an organism is motivated to perform a variety of activities in order to satisfy these basic needs. The positive striving has many formulations most of which see self-fulfillment and the need to enhance relationships in the society as constituting the propelling force (Kidd, 1973). However, the focus of this paper is on Abraham Maslow, whose theory synthesizes all the views into an all-embracing single formulation. Maslow, through empirical and theoretical studies, came out with the theory of hierarchy of human needs as the potent forces that initiate, energize and direct human behaviour.

The main concern of this paper is to find out the extent to which the Maslovian Theory has been injected into adult education curriculum in the country, and, to suggest ways in which the curriculum could fully be infested with the tenets of the theory. Curriculum in this paper means purposeful educational experiences provided and directed to achieve pre-determined goals (Onwuka, 1981). It embraces predetermined objectives in accordance with the needs of the clientele, content or learning experiences to achieve the objectives, organization of the learning experiences, and evaluation so as to ascertain the extent to which the objectives are achieved. In order to do some justice to this intention, firstly, the Maslovian theory will have to be explained. Secondly, a peep into

adult education curriculum in the country should be had so as to know the extent to which the theory has characterized the curriculum. Finally, suggestions will be made regarding ways and means to improve the curriculum in line with Maslow's postulations.

### **Maslovian Theory**

Maslow (1970) conceives a human being, not as an empty organism, but as an active being whose behaviour is being propelled by some potent forces. He calls these forces organismically based needs. He postulates that unsatisfied need creates tension within an organism and serves as a force to direct behaviour towards reduction of the tension. Maslow arranges the human needs into a hierarchy in their order of prepotency. Placing the needs in five stages, he formulates the principles under which they operate thus: (a) it is only when a person partially gratifies a more basic and pressing need that the next level on the hierarchy rears up its head; (b) deprivation of a satisfied need best equips one to seek a way to restore the gratification of the need in future; and (c) when basic needs have been met, people become healthy and motivated to actualize their highest potentialities. The Maslovian hierarchical arrangement of human needs is presented in Figure I.

The most basic needs for an organism's survival are the physiological needs for food, water, sex, air and elimination of wastes. Satisfaction of these needs equips one to proceed to the next level of Safety Needs, which make for self-preservation. When one attains safety insurance against pain and danger of life, his energy is then directed to the Love and Belongingness Needs. These affectionate needs draw one to be part of a group and to experience sharing within peer groups and the general community. Next are the esteem Needs which result in self-respect, self-confidence and feeling of fullness. Gratification of these needs makes one to have emotional satisfaction and stability, but failure to attain them results in poor self-concept and loss of age identity. The highest level on the hierarchy is the self-actualization Need, which makes one to fulfill one's individual nature in all its ramifications and thereby to have feeling of

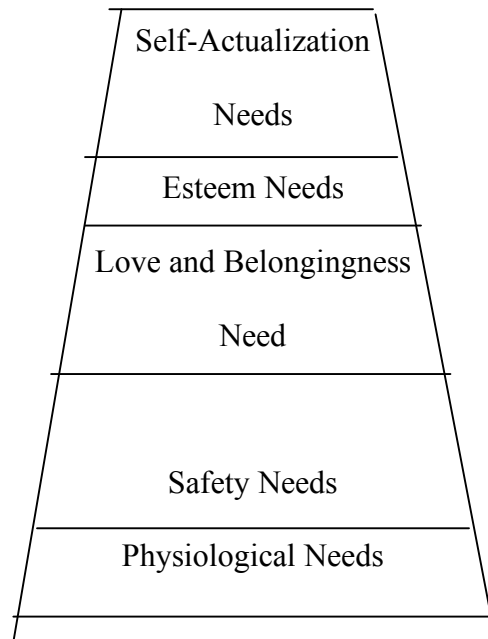


Fig. I: Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs.

ecstasy, wonder and awe, and becoming free from cultural and self-imposed restraints. Maslow sees this need as a healthy man's prime motivation.

Knowles (1980), admitting the potency of and the pressure being exerted by the basic human needs, postulates that the pressure being exerted on individuals is just a starting point in that many alternatives to satisfy the needs are open to people. Also, that the alternative to be chosen is mediated by or at least influenced by some cultural forces (such as laws, mores and economic conditions) and by one's character (including abilities, goals, values, attitudes and interests). Thus Knowles' formulation is very relevant to adult education, because while an adult is propelled towards satisfaction of his needs, he does so along the norms of his socio-cultural environment and psychological orientation. That is, an adult does not act instinctively, but subjects his choice of actions to socio-cultural and moral approval.

Some people have observed that Maslow's theory characterizes a human being as an every wanting animal (Uba, 1980; Onyehalu, 1983). Even this view is in consonance with the nature of a human being as a conscious being. If a human being does not graduate from satisfying one need to wanting to satisfy another, no doubt, he becomes stunted and unprogressive. In the words of Freire (1972a, 1972b), man as a conscious being must be aware of his existential reality. It is this awareness that marks man off

from other animals. This is the import of the Maslow's principle that deprivation of a gratified need best equips a person to restore it in future.

However, self-actualization in Maslow's model should not be conceived as the terminal point of one's motivation. Rather, it is a continuing dynamic process, according to Boshier (1977). One is really a self-actualizing person and not necessarily a self-actualized person. Maslow (1970) describes self-actualizing person as having:

*limitless horizons opening up to the vision, the feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and also more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of great ecstasy and wonder and awe, the loss of placing in time and space within, finally, the conviction that something extremely important had happened, so that the subject is to some extent transformed and strengthened even in his daily life by such experiences.*

Thus, a human being, ever in the process of satisfying one need or another has his behaviour being propelled by the force of the need. This therefore makes it that one's attention is naturally attracted to any activity, learning or otherwise, which relates to satisfaction of a need at any point in time.

### **Adult Education Curriculum in Nigeria: A Historical Sketch**

The appointment of A.J. Carpenter as a Mass Education Officer in 1946 marked the official participation of the British Colonial master in Adult Education in Nigeria. Adult literacy was a pivotal component of the mass education campaign, and it was aimed at the basic skill of reading, writing and arithmetic. By the end of 1946, the literacy was conceived as fundamental education which would enable adults gain basic knowledge and rudimentary skills in order to participate more effectively in the social and economic progress of their communities. For instance, the mass education publications by 1949, according to Osuji (1981) included: (a) Oil palm plantation in Igbo; (b) Cocoa in Yoruba; and (c) Irrigated garden, Soya beans, and growing tomatoes in Hausa. Thus, the socio-economic orientation of the literacy materials was a precursor of the functional literacy concept, which was the brainchild of the UNESCO adopted at Teheran (Iran) in 1965.

The needs and interests of the students still caused a redefinition of the theory and concept of the literacy. Hence, in 1951, the campaign was rechristened "remedial primary education" in which the programme went beyond basic literacy to include post-literacy. The curriculum then embraced subjects taught in the primary schools in order to enable the adults attain education equivalent to that offered in the primary schools. This remedial primary approach, through which adults pass and attain First School Leaving Certificate, still characterizes adult literacy education in Nigeria (Osuji, 1981).

Also all the functional literacy programmes have been successfully executed in the country. The continuing education component of adult education was sequel to the publication of the Elliot and the Asquith Commissions Reports in 1945. The Oxford

University Extra-Mural Delegacy started classes in selected towns in the country in 1947. The curriculum was composed of liberal and human studies. The classes were non-vocational and no certificates were issued, nor was the intention to prepare students for any external examinations (Osuji, 1981). As from October 1949 when the department of Extra-mural of the newly established University College, Ibadan, took over the classes, it still adopted “The Great Tradition in University Adult Education” (Wiltshire, 1956, p. 88-91) in Britain in which non-vocational and non-examination oriented programmes featured. This was incongruent with the aspirations of the students who desired classes that would prepare them for external examinations so as to acquire recognizable certificates for social and economic up-liftment (Dudley, 1963).

The Ashby Commission Report of 1960 gave much impetus to vocational and examination-oriented programmes of continuing education, so as to raise manpower for the services of the nation. Thus, the universities as from the sixties saw extra-mural classes in the spirit of Ashby. Also, the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), established in 1971, saw continuing education from the perspectives of the overall national needs and development through training and retraining the nation’s manpower (Osuji, 1985). Hence, the ITF programmes appealed to the needs and interest of the recipients.

From the above historical sketch, we see the interplay between the content of programmes and the needs/interests of adults. When the literacy and the continuing education programmes were congruent with the aspirations of the adult learners, they became acceptable by the clientele. This accentuates the fact that adult education curriculum should be made focusing on the needs and interest of the clientele at any point in time.

### **The Maslovian Theory and the Curriculum**

Maslow presents needs as forces that organize human perception and action. That is, human organism is directed towards satisfaction of needs. Perhaps it is necessary to show the relationship between need and interest. Interest is a liking, a preference or a proclivity of an individual to respond in a certain way towards the satisfaction of his needs. Interest may grow out of a need. It may be a substitute of a need. Interest is very crucial for effective learning. Hence effort should be made by adult educators to stimulate the students’ interests and to translate their needs into interests.

Knowles (1980) identifies two kinds of needs which adult educators should address themselves to. These are: basic human needs and educational needs. The basic human needs are the universal fundamental biological and psychological requirements such as postulated by Maslow. The educational needs are constituted in the gap between what-is and what-ought-to-be. That is the gap between the present level of competencies of adults and the higher level required for effective functioning in their societies. For adult education curriculum to be effective, it should aim at satisfying both the basic and the educational needs.

Adults are mentally mature and socially responsible, and their needs and interests attract and attach them very much to educational programmes and learning situations. Therefore, adult educators should endeavour to translate both the basic human needs and the educational needs into interests so as to attract the attention of the students. Freire (1972a, 1972b) advocates involving adults in the process of diagnosing their needs so as to enable them read their worlds through the words. By this Freire means that when adults are led to have a self-diagnosis of their needs, their needs are translated into interests, because, what they read will have relevance to their existential realities.

It should be noted that people differ in needs and interests. Therefore, in choosing curriculum for adults their specific needs and interests should be considered and these will govern the objectives, content and methodology. According to Kidd (1973), choosing a curriculum for adults means understanding the needs and interests of the learner, understanding the situation in which he lives, and the kinds of content that may serve his needs. It means a careful statement of objectives in a form that sets out the desired changes as well as the subject matter. It means selection of the precise learning experiences that may best accomplish these objectives. It assumes the fullest possible participation by the learner in curriculum building.

As a result of the uniqueness of individuals and communities, the first step towards effective adult education curriculum should be carrying out a survey to ascertain the needs of adults. After knowing the needs, then objectives will be selected based on the needs. There should not be any assumption that the needs of adults in one community should be the needs of those from other communities. While the Maslovian hierarchical arrangement of human needs should guide in curriculum building, there should never be any assumption that any group of adults must be on a particular level. This should be discovered through a well-guided survey. What is required is to provide for every interest.

Perhaps we need to look at the National Policy on Education (1981) for more information. In the Adult Education Section, objectives and contents are listed. The objectives are: (a) to provide functional literacy education for adults who have never had the advantage of any formal education; (b) to provide functional and remedial education for those young people who prematurely dropped out of the formal school system; (c) to provide further education for different categories of completers of the formal education in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills; (d) to provide in-service on-the-job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills; and, (e) to give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

One could commend the objectives for being comprehensive enough to cater for the educational needs of adults in the country. Hence, the programmes listed include: mass and functional literacy for the illiterates; remedial or second-chance education for the premature drop-outs from the formal system; further opportunities for completers of different levels of education to continue their education; vocational programmes for enhancement of working skills; and, liberal education for widening of mental horizons. Of course the comprehensiveness of the programmes are in line with the declaration that

“Life-Long Education will be the basis for the nation’s educational policies” (NPE, 1981, p. 8).

The Maslovian theory demands that any programme should accord with the needs and interests of a particular group of adults. This is in keeping with the made-to-measure nature of adult education programmes. For instance, in communities where people are tormented by illiteracy, hunger and poverty resulting in lack of internal urge to direct their attention to the solution of these basic needs, literacy is needed as a Cultural Action for Freedom (Freire, 1972b). This follows Knowles’ (1980, p.29) view that the adult educators mission is to help individuals learn what is required for gratification of their needs at whatever level that are struggling. If they are hungry, they must be helped to learn what will get them food; if they are well fed, safe, loved and esteemed, they must be helped to explore undeveloped capacities and become their full-selves. These constitute the need for programmes, which must aim at leading adults along the paths of the Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, each according to his desires till he gets to the utmost he could. Even on attaining self-actualization needs, adult education should still enable one to continue self-actualizing, continuing learning and never satiated in learning.

Boshier (1971, 1977) uses the term “life-space” or “growth motivated” to characterize adult education participants who are in the upper socio-economic groups and are self-actualizing. These participate for expression rather than in an attempt to cope with some aspects of life. These participants see adult education as a part of continuous manifestation of self-actualizing behaviours, and therefore are continuous learners. On the other hand, “life-chance” or “deficiency-motivated” participants are of the lower socio-economic status. These are fixated on the lower level of Maslow’s hierarchy. In Boshier’s study, life-chance participants scored high on the factors, which constituted the deficiency cluster. These participate because of the need to acquire utilitarian knowledge, attitude and skills for survival. That is, these attend in order to satisfy the lower order needs on Maslow’s hierarchy. Thus, this is a justification for some adult education programmes, such as, functional literacy and vocational education in general, and the craving for examination-oriented programmes as we discussed above.

Nevertheless, if satisfaction of one basic need, in Maslow’s theory, makes for the next level on the hierarchy to be felt, it then means that the life-chance participants, in Boshier’s categorization, will, if well provided for, move towards life-space motivation. Boshier acknowledges this possibility when he admits that the life-chance are in the short time primarily trying to improve their life-chances, while in the long-term are seeking to expand their life-spaces through the expansion of their social and vocational horizons. This is so, because, as one moves higher on Maslow’s hierarchy, his social, psychological and vocational horizons widen, hence life-chances and life-spaces are opposite ends of a single continuum.

The implication of the Boshier’s study is that provisions should be made to cater for the educational needs and interests of every adult as he moves up the social ladder. Boshier (1971) stresses that all adult education participants are goal-oriented and their

goals are related to the extent to which they have satisfied the lower related to the extent to which they have satisfied the lower order needs on Maslow's hierarchy.

The promise for "aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment" will give adults opportunity to satisfy the higher order needs. This accentuates the importance of organizing liberal courses, seminars and conferences where adults are gathered to deliberate over issues. To help adults cultivate attitude of satisfying their higher order needs, adult educators should develop in them the habit of self-learning. That is making them autonomous learners so that they continue to enrich their minds in whatever direction they desire. This is the essence of lifelong education in which making people learn-how-to-learn becomes an operative term. Also, this highlights the need for liberal education to assist adults who need to broaden their outlook of life, generate critical thinking and increase their knowledge (Omolewa, 1981). Furthermore, there is need for public libraries to be established in different places in order to enable adults get access to books on their interests and enrich their minds continuously.

It should be realized that it is not only the content that provides adults opportunity to satisfy their needs. The methodology and the educators' behaviour have much to contribute. For instance, there is much need for harmonious and peaceful atmosphere so that students will get some sense of security. Students should be given the opportunity to air their views and to contribute to lessons so as to promote spontaneity and sense of recognition among members of the class. No student should be ridiculed for failure to perform up to expectation, nor should their failures be paraded. Good attempts and performances are of course to be praised, but care should be taken not to harm the feeling of those members of the class who do not measure up.

The above facts underscore the need for professionals who are knowledgeable in theory and practice of adult education. Therefore, the declaration in the NPE (1981) that:

Educated Nigerian adults, at all levels, who are capable of imparting any form of knowledge will after an orientation course, be encouraged and invited to participate in national service as teachers in Adult Education Programme throughout the country on specified schedules; they will be encouraged, as far as they feel able, to render the service free to the nation...

To say the least, this declaration smacks of lack of commitment on the part of the Government to the cause of adult education. Also, it betrays Government's failure to employ many graduates of adult education, to be a deliberate act. As a matter of fact, part-time teachers are used in adult education because of economic advantages. Any committed government should make efforts to employ conscientious professionals who will be well remunerated. People of right caliber, who can render creditable services should be employed. However, where some Nigerians are patriotic enough as to render their services free of charge, that is good, but it should not be incorporated into a National Policy on Education. This is more so when it is not the case in other Sections of the Policy. To effectively satisfy the educational aspirations of Nigerian adults, demands providing for every adult according to his needs and interests. Therefore, there is great

need for committed professionals who will be appropriately remunerated. This is necessary because of the urgency of understanding the programmes, the adults and their needs.

Evaluation component of curriculum should not be left out. There is need to ascertain how well we are doing in the light of our objectives and also taking into account the resources employed. It should be realized that any educational experience involves the interaction of the teacher, the student or participants and the selected curriculum content, to produce new patterns of behaviour in the participants. Therefore, any effective evaluation should cover all the three aspects (Okeem, 1979). Stufflebeam (1975) sees evaluation as serving the purposes of accountability and decision-making. Accountability is justification of the value of a programme to sponsors, clientele or the society. This calls for summative evaluation. The second purpose is to improve decision-making by providing information to the programme managers for improvement of the quality of the programme. This accentuates the need for formative evaluation, so that weakness could be monitored and corrected immediately. Thus, evaluation in adult education should serve diagnostic, corrective and guiding purposes. Evaluators in adult education should be concerned with the transfer of learning to behavioral performance because the final measure of the value of any adult education programme should be the actual changes in behaviour it helps participants to accomplish (Knowles, 1980, p. 202-212). Self-evaluation should also be encouraged so as to generate in the students the attitude of self-confidence. Also, for lifelong learning to be achieved, students should be able to evaluate themselves and their achievements in their learning undertakings.

The need for evaluation underscores the urgency of establishment of extra-ministerial units, such as the National and the State Adult Education Commissions to monitor all aspects of adult education including evaluation (Akinpelu, 1987, p. 55). It is gratifying to note that the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education, established by Decree 17 of 1990, is now charged with the responsibility of planning, co-ordinating and monitoring all aspects of adult education in the country. But the relevance of evaluation to effective adult education delivery accentuates the necessity for a trained manpower.

### **Conclusion**

The Maslovian theory of the hierarchy of human needs highlights the propelling force of needs to human behaviour. Thus any activity, including learning, which relates to satisfaction of a need, attracts the interest of an adult. This therefore makes the concept of need a crucial factor in adult education curriculum. An historical sketch of adult education curriculum in the country revealed that the programmes that were not based on the socio-economic needs of the students did not accord with their aspirations, while those that were based on their socio-economic needs were congruent with their educational aspirations. Therefore, to infest adult education curriculum in the country with the tenets of the Maslow's theory, there should be: a survey to ascertain the needs and interests of different groups of adults; provision for different interests; efficient and

effective delivery machinery, including units for monitoring achievements; and above all, efficient professionals capable of affording students opportunities to satisfy their needs, at whichever level, not only through the content of programmes, but also through activities in their classes.

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