

Inclusivity of Adult Education Practice in Nigeria.

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Abstract

Inclusivity in adult education is a practice of ensuring that educational opportunities are accessible to all adult learners, regardless of their socio-economic status, gender, age, ethnicity, disability, geographic location, or any other factor that might traditionally exclude them. Its practice is aimed at creating a learning environment that respects and values diversity encouraging participation. This paper explores the critical issue of inclusivity in adult education practices in Nigeria, and opines that current efforts fall short of addressing the diverse needs of adult learners. It examined the concept of inclusion, inclusive education and its pillars, the concept of adult education, its characteristics and goals and inclusivity nature. The inclusivity of adult education practice in Nigeria is crucial for achieving equitable socio-economic progress. With the transformative potential of adult education, the article calls for a renewed commitment from all stakeholders to create an inclusive, accessible, and empowering educational environment for all adults in Nigeria. Thus advancing inclusivity in adult education, Nigeria can better equip its adult population with the skills and knowledge necessary for personal and national development, empowering the Nigerian adult population and driving sustainable national development.

Keywords: Inclusion, Inclusivity, Adult Education, Programmes, Adult Learners.

Introduction

Education is a right as declared by the United Nation, which every nation is striving to provide for her citizens as every individual irrespective of age has the right to quality education and learning. However many are still unable to have access to education especially formal education that has operated a closed and exclusive system, depriving many from acquiring skills to improve themselves for the benefit of all. No society prefers to be stagnant without positive change and this is only achievable through inclusiveness that will ignite the potentials of all. Here comes adult education that operates an inclusive flexible system that carries everyone along by its programmes and operational principles. Inclusive systems require changes at all levels of society.

Adult education plays an indirect but significant role in the education of individuals as well as economic development of a nation. It is a truth that without adult education and adult literacy, it is not possible to have a range and speed of economic and social development that makes it worthwhile in terms of values and welfare. Because it is not possible to impart all types of

education to various categories of learners through adult education programmes. Non-classroom education of adult learners has immense importance, particularly for a developing society, and a society with low levels of literacy, high illiteracy, and low development. This implies that adult education has an inclusive elements in its scope, structure, operations and functionalities.

Concept of Inclusion.

Inclusion is an educational practice whereby students with special needs are fully integrated into the general education classrooms at a school. Inclusion is seen as a universal human right, with the aim to embrace all people irrespective of race, gender, disability, medical or other need. It is about giving equal access and opportunities and getting rid of discrimination and intolerance by removing barriers, real or imaginary. (Ivory. 2018) It affects all aspects of public life. Inclusion is about making sure that the marginalized members of a society/school are not only told they are included but also made to feel included. Inclusion philosophy rests on the idea that every individual, regardless of his/her disabilities and condition, has the right to be incorporated fully into the fabric of society. Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods vision serving to provide all learners of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a learning experience and the environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences (UNESCO; 2019) Inclusion is seen also as a universal human right. The aim of inclusion is to embrace all people irrespective of race, gender, disability, medical or other need. It is about giving equal access and opportunities and getting rid of discrimination and intolerance (removal of barriers). It affects all aspects of public life. This core aim of inclusion is to creates a welcoming environment that embraces the differences and offers respect for everybody in terms of words and actions, allowing all to bring their entire, authentic selves to the work Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, instructional methods vision serving to provide all learners of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a learning experience and the environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. (Allan. 2008)

Inclusion of learners as adults or children occurs at four stages as identified by McMaster, (2012). which are

- *Exclusion.* At this stage, no effort is made by the learner and they cannot interact with other learners. They are also not allowed to participate or enroll into the programme and in some cases out rightly rejected and asked to go to somewhere else.
- *Segregation.* At this stage, the learners are thought admitted into the programme, but not allowed to socialize with others that enrolled for the programme. They are usually separated are their needs looked into in other to meet them.
- *Integration.* Here the learners are allowed to be part of the learning process. However, elements of segregation are promoted through the use of language. The language used is distinctive from inclusive language. Adaptions are made and support put in place to “fit”

the learner into the learning environment. Task are designed to ascertain the capacity of the learner, with observation the instructor to determine their capacity.

- *Inclusion.* At this level all activities are learner centred with every learner need met with all meaningfully engaged with learner goals set. Physically participation of all learners is encouraged with learning instruction designed base on learners needs. Activities selected by the instructors and the methodologies employ are to meet learners needs. Individual learned needs are focused on, with everyone seen as having the right to participate in the programme.

Pillars of Inclusion.

The practice of inclusive education is anchored on seven pillars of inclusion which are, access, attitude, choice, partnership, communication, policy and opportunities (McMaster, 2013).

- *Access.* Access as a principle of inclusion is centres on the importance of a conducive learning environment that welcome all learners. This is about what learners as participants experience in the process of the programme. It's also about the feel, the environment, the culture that's in the place that you're in. You could have a laudable objective but when clients enroll how he feels matters. But if the person who greets them makes them feel unwelcome or told they're not welcome but can be managed then the programme is irrelevant to them. So it's important to explore what access really means in the physical and non-physical environment.
- *Attitude.* This is centred on how willing people are to embrace inclusion and diversity and to take meaningful action. So ask yourself, how willing are you to actually make it happen? In pulling the Seven Pillars together it was identified that there was a gap between simply wanting to be inclusive and actually doing something about it. So your attitude isn't about just being positive, it's about having a willingness to take real action.
- *Choice.* This is all about finding out what options people want and how they want to get involved. This is about identifying what a participant can do. Choice is the friend of inclusion. If you offer lot of options to take advantage of then you are likely to get more diverse people involved in your activities and programmes
- *Partnerships.* Partnerships looks at how individual and organizational relationships are formed and how effective they are. A partnership could be as easy as an introduction, conversation and a handshake. It can be really informal. You've just got to connect people. It could be more formal with agreements and MOUs and contracts but partnerships are what bind us together and join our communities. Understanding the influencers in your networks will help you identify key partners.
- *Communication.* Communication examines the way we let people know about the options to get involved and about the culture. So think about who you are telling and also how you are telling them. Is it suiting their needs of communication? Communicating your commitment, intentions and actions is critical to embedding an inclusive approach.

Otherwise, good actions can become the ‘best kept secret’ of a handful of people. The good news is that these days it is easier than ever to communicate, internally and externally, your intentions and actions about inclusion.

- *Policy.* Policy considers how an organisation commits to and takes responsibility for inclusion. Policy is about holding yourself, your organisation and your stakeholders to account for inclusion. It’s about saying “Inclusion is important” but more than that it’s about saying, “This is how we’re going to address it and this is what it means for us and then having mechanisms to actually deliver on those statements.
- *Opportunities.* Opportunity explores what options are available for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is similar to choice but it’s not the same. Opportunities is about what do you want to do. So this explores the habits that dictate the opportunities that are actually available in the place that you deliver your sport. Opportunity is creating a favourable or advantageous circumstance or occasion that presents a chance for someone to do something they desire or achieve a particular outcome. It often implies a moment where one can capitalize on a situation, make progress, or fulfill a goal, potentially leading to personal or professional advancement. Opportunities can arise in various forms, such as career prospects, personal relationships, educational pursuits, or even unforeseen chances that allow for growth and development. As an example, I have a whole range of things that I might want to do but can I actually take advantage of that choice. I want to go into that really great program. They want me to come in there but I have a real access issue so the actual opportunity doesn’t exist for me. The choice is there but I don’t get the opportunity.

Meaning and Purpose of Adult Education:

Adult education as a field of discipline is a practice where adults are engaged in systematic and sustained process of self-educating activities aimed at gaining new knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values. It is a process designed for adults who are no longer in school, or do not attend school regularly on full time or school dropouts undertake sequential (Chronological) and organized educational activities on various subjects peculiar to their needs. (Hanachor. & Olumanti 2014). The main purpose is to bring change in knowledge, attitude, and skill for the purpose of identifying and solving personal or community problems. Adult education is operated by using all forms of educative experiences needed by clients dictated by their varying interests and requirements at their differing levels of understanding and capacity on their society induce changing roles and responsibilities. Adult education can be summarized as a post vocational education, training of basic skills of learning for the deprived classes. (Devasis, 2022.). It operates on a part-time basis and it is organized and sequential. The goal of adult education is to increase the quality of life of individuals and enable them to identify and activates their potentials (self-realization) and thus raise the standard of living of families, communities, societies and nations, it is also aimed to promote peace and communal harmony in the multi-cultural global village thereby enhancing the pace of development and welfare of the individual and the community as whole. The objectives of adult education can be summarized into:-

- **Literacy education:** This scope covers basic literacy, scientific literacy, economic literacy, technological literacy, legal literacy, computer literacy, and so on.
- **Provision of basic life skills:** This includes awareness about one's self, the community and society, about social, economic, political, cultural, environmental, developmental, health, hygiene. It also include peace, welfare, and harmonious growth and development of the individual, family, and community,
- **Promoting functionality:** This includes application of individuals, collective, community, corporate, national and international knowledge, skills, attitudes, practices, resources, etc. for addressing felt needs, solving problems, promoting individual public participation in various activities and for bringing out social, economic, cultural, political transformation for raising general level or standard of living of the individual, community, nation and the world.

Characteristics of Adult Education:

Adult education is very dynamic and Self-motivated in nature. Its role, purpose and functions changes with changing situations and conditions of adults. Accordingly its nature and character also undergo changes. Broadly, the nature and characteristic features of adult education include

- Adult education is community based with significance.
- The nature, objectives and types of adult education required vary from culture to culture.
- Adult education is based on felt- needs and prevalent problems of communities and aims at addressing them in effectively.
- It involves adults at different levels and stages of planning, implementation and evaluation of its activities.
- Adult education is flexible making adult feel at home and comfortable to acquire education that has relevance to their living, working and development.
- Adult education is dynamic and primarily aimed at bringing in social, economic, political and cultural transformation of the adult in any society.
- It promotes and enhances adults' awareness and prompting them to action for change leading to emancipating/liberating adults from their current problems and situations.
- It relies on the experiences of adults.
- It promotes and enhances rational and informed social, economic, political and cultural decision making of individuals.
- It is a systematically organized process, using diverse methods and techniques of teaching and learning with an in-built element or component of flexibility for promotion of more learner-centered educational activities. Jarvis, (2010).
- It is very effective in building the network of adults, their groups, activities and associations in the particular context and situation in which the adults live.

Goals of adult Education.

- Adult education as a multidisciplinary process is oriented to favour lifelong education for all, as well as efficient learning throughout life.
- It aims to provide the knowledge that improves professional qualifications and to achieve civic, social, moral and cultural attitudes and skills for performing responsibilities and for progress in all spheres of life, as adults are fully engaged in the world of work.
- It prepares individuals so that they may perform multiple functions participating in the life of their community as an individually or collectively.
- Adult Education brings a new hope for the illiterate masses who failed to get education during their school years. Though a well-defined programme of Adult Education, the illiterate adults can hope to take part in the day to day activities of their country.

Inclusive Adult Education

Adult education by its nature and content can be practiced as formal, non- formal and informal type of education. It encompasses the pre –initial education (age 1-6), initial education (age 7-30) and post initial education (age 30 and above). Thus it takes care of the education of the individual from birth to grave, which is life-long learning. It plays a significant role in the political, social, economic, cultural and religious change of individuals and does not discriminate as all learners are welcome and taken care of, thereby included, which is the pivot of sustainable development. Thus adult education by its content and scope has an imbedded inclusive property. Inclusivity is the intention or policy of including people who are otherwise excluded or marginalized in a designed programme. (UNESCO.2018) This is emphasized alongside equity in SDG 4, in the UNESCO's Education 2030 Framework for Action as the foundations for quality education.

In any field of endeavour and learning programme, there are learners who are disadvantaged and caused by different factors. However adult education programme by its nature is designed to cater for all, meaning that all can participate in its programmes.

Inclusive adult education refers to educational programs and practices that is aimed to accommodate and support the learning needs of a diverse range of adult learners, including those with disabilities, learning difficulties, or other barriers to education. The goal of inclusive adult education is to ensure that all adults, regardless of their background, abilities, or circumstances, have access to learning opportunities that meet their individual needs and enable them to achieve their full potential. Inclusive adult education programs include adult literacy classes, vocational training, community development, environmental adult education, prison education, farmers education, herbalist education, traditional birth attendance education, continuing education courses, and other learning opportunities tailored to the needs and interests of adult learners. By adopting inclusive practices, adult education providers can help ensure that all adults have the opportunity to participate fully in lifelong learning and skill development, thereby promoting social inclusion, economic empowerment, and personal growth.

Booth, & Ainscow, (2011), identifies the principles for Inclusive adult education to include:

- i. Accessibility: Ensuring that educational facilities, materials, and technologies are accessible to all learners, including those with disabilities.
- ii. Flexibility: Providing a variety of learning formats, schedules, and methods to accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences.
- iii. Individualized support: Offering personalized support and assistance to learners who require additional help to overcome barriers to learning.
- iv. Diversity and inclusivity: Creating an environment that respects and values the diversity of adult learners and fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion for all.
- v. Collaboration and partnership: Working collaboratively with learners, educators, community organizations, and other stakeholders to design and implement inclusive educational programs and initiatives.

Components of Inclusive Adult Education

Inclusive adult education is aimed to accommodate diverse learners, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or circumstances. Its components encompass various strategies, methods, and considerations to ensure accessibility and effectiveness for all participants as clients. Here are some key components of inclusive adult education:

- i. Accessible Learning Materials: Providing materials in multiple formats (e.g., digital, audio, large print) to accommodate different learning styles and needs.
- ii. Flexible Learning Environment: Offering flexible scheduling, locations, and modes of delivery (in-person, online, blended) to accommodate learners' work, family, and personal commitments.
- iii. Adaptive Technology: Integrating assistive technologies and tools to support learners with disabilities or diverse learning needs.
- iv. Culturally Relevant Curriculum: Developing curriculum and instructional materials that reflect the cultural diversity of learners and incorporate their lived experiences.
- v. Language Support: Offering language support services, such as translation, interpretation, or ESL (English as a Second Language) instruction, for learners with limited English proficiency.
- vi. Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Implementing UDL principles to design instructional materials and activities that are accessible and effective for a wide range of learners.
- vii. Individualized Learning Plans: Creating personalized learning plans for learners based on their goals, needs, and prior knowledge.
- viii. Collaborative Learning Communities: Fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment where learners can collaborate, share experiences, and learn from one another.
- ix. Qualified Instructors: Training instructors in inclusive teaching practices and providing ongoing support to ensure they can effectively meet the diverse needs of adult learners.

- x. Accessible Assessment and Evaluation: Using diverse assessment methods (e.g., portfolios, projects, presentations) that allow learners to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in ways that align with their strengths and abilities.
 - xi. Community Partnerships. Collaborating with community organizations, employers, and other stakeholders to provide additional support services, resources, and opportunities for learners.
 - xii. Awareness and Sensitivity. Promoting awareness and sensitivity among staff and participants regarding issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- By incorporating these components into adult education programs, institutions can create more inclusive learning environments that empower all learners to achieve their educational goals and fulfill their potential.

Way Forward.

1. Define clear minimum standards of behaviour. Every adult learner should be made to clearly understand what the minimum, basic acceptable behaviours are. These are rules to guide the learners collectively thought of and agreed by both the clients and clientele. Once agreed, all are made to take an undertaking to abide by the rules created by them, learners. These rule are presented in short and simple terms for all learners (clients) so everyone can understand them. The purpose of these rules is to specifically ensure that everyone feels safe and respected. Example of some of these rules are:-

- Be kind to one another
- Keep your hands and feet to yourself
- Use kind words at all times
- Always respect the opinion/suggestion of others
- Everyone has the right to be taught, feel safe and respected
- Everyone has the right to express themselves and be listened to

2. Enforce those standards consistently. Rules are put in place to guide behaviour with consequences attached, thus, they must be enforced. However these consequences must be proportionate and consistently applied. Enforcing these rules requires the adult educator to constantly evaluate his methods to ensure that they are inclusive and engaging for all learners which reduces disruptive behaviour among adult learners.

Some simple strategies that can be adopted by the adult educator may include:

- Having eye contact with the learner at the first instance.
- But if it continues then refer to the rules and ensure that all learners are engaged in a quick task such as talk, pair. Then talk to the disruptive learners to talk to him separately, informing the learner that he is disrupting others and breaking the agreed rule share.
- On persistent abnormal behaviour, then endeavour to ascertain the cause of the behaviour.

3. Deal with low level disruption in a sensitive way. Deal with the learners with caution and respect as adult learners. They need knowledge for immediate use and application to

solve issues. Ensure that their personality and integrity are respected and protected. Therefore avoid comments that affects their personality. Some comments will not be inclusive but rather insulting and humiliating which must be avoided by the client

4. **Create opportunities to listen to all Learners.** This is especially important when resolving conflicts between adult learners in your class. Allow time for their full explanation on the incident, as well as the caused as perceived by them. Create opportunities during normal lessons and learning, for them to be listened. This helps them engage with the learning and feel included in it. Listen to all their thoughts and opinions on the programme. When adult learners feel listened to, they feel respected and included.
5. **Develop a scaffold approach to learning.** Adults are faced with different types of problems that tend to hinder their active participation in any learning programmes, even though it is important for them. The adult educator need to develop a scaffolding approach, which means giving support so that all learners can access the same learning. Scaffolding is key to creating an inclusive learning environment. Ensure that all learners are accessing the same information during a lesson even if you slightly differentiate your resources and activities.
6. **Be aware of the specific needs of every child in your class.** Adult education programmes are need centred and adults are engaged in learning to acquire knowledge they use immediately. The adult educator must therefore be able to identify their individual needs. A truly inclusive classroom, ensures that learners need are identified. .Knowing this will help you consider every aspect of your classroom, and how you make it inclusive, safe and purposeful..
7. **Provide support that benefit ALL learners.** All learners need help and assistance, therefore the adult educator should provide and implement strategies that benefit all the learners enrolled into the programme. These are inclusion strategies that may be universally accepted. Learners with dyslexic traits struggle to read pure black text on a pure white background. Simply changing the colours you use on your slides, avoiding black on white, can help not only children with a dyslexia diagnosis, but *all* children..
8. **Create a calm, purposeful learning environment.** This is another big one which promotes inclusion for all in your classroom. We all need to calm in order to learn. But creating a calm environment is a tricky thing to master. Ensure you clearly define when group discussion or working is required and acceptable, and when it is not..
9. **Clearly display training schedules and key information.** This is one of those little changes you can make which helps everyone, and makes all learners feel included. With a clearly displayed training scheduled, adult learner can look ahead to their favourite or least favourite activities, and mentally prepare accordingly..
10. **Use pre-assessment to inform your planning.** Pre assessment is about engaging adult learners and making them feel like they have a say in their own learning. Don't just assume what adult learners already know or don't know when you're planning a new topic; ask

them! That way you'll identify areas which learners are curious to learn more about, and avoid going over very familiar learning. Pre-assessing adults' prior knowledge, and interests around a subject, in this way shows them that they have been listened to, and included in their own learning. It's a powerful tool for inclusion in the classroom.

11. Let Adults choose how to show what they have learned. Inclusion works by finding the best way to ensure all children can access the learning, and have the opportunity to achieve. Setting exactly the same task for all adults may not help you to achieve that, particularly when it comes to assessing learning. When you get to the end of the topic, it might be tempting to assess learning with a test. Giving adult learners a choice empowers them. It's inclusive, because it creates equal opportunities to show learning and progress in a way that a standard test (which many children struggle with) may not.

12. Don't compare the progress of learners to another; personal progress is key. And so, our final, and possibly most important strategy for an inclusive environment that benefits all learners is you do not need to compare learner to one another. Learning is not a competition. It is a never-ending process, a journey. For some learners with additional needs, the comparison between themselves and others in their class can feel as stark, and as disheartening. How can comparing the attainment of one learner to another possibly help either of them?

Conclusion

Diversity and represented by adult education, has the potential benefits for talent and skill optimization, stakeholder satisfaction, decision making and innovation. However without inclusion, the challenges of managing diversity may prevent the attainment of educational goals among adult learners. Through adult education, we can create a more innovative, equal and sustainable society where people have the skills and knowledge needed to live and work healthy and productive, as well as take an active part in cultural and civic activities throughout their life. The world in its operation and functionality operates in a class system, where everyone is classified creating boundaries that requires certain criteria for migration from one class to the other, thus excluding some. These are issues within the society that adult education alone tends to solve. While other discipline solidifies the exclusion boundaries, adult education democratically removes the boundaries to include all. This is because adult education focusses on all issues of man. The principles of inclusion promote equity, access, opportunities and the rights of every learner in education to care and contribute to reducing discrimination against them. Adult education in its programmes fits perfectly into this role as everyone irrespective of age has a space in adult education programmes. Therefore, inclusive adult education serves as a catalyst by empowering individuals, fostering social cohesion, promoting economic prosperity, and advancing environmental stewardship. By investing in adult learning opportunities that are accessible, relevant, and inclusive, societies can unlock the full potential of their human capital and create a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable future for all.

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