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## CHAPTER 36

### BRIDGING THE GAP FOR INCLUSIVENESS THROUGH ADULT EDUCATION

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#### **Introduction**

Education is generally acknowledged as a veritable tool for societal transformation. It is a means through which skills and knowledge are acquired by individuals without any social inclination. Participation in the acquisition of this knowledge for societal transformation therefore involves the readiness of all people irrespective of class, background, age and affiliations. This quest for learning at any level, time and place invariably accounts for the position of adult education in lifelong learning. Adult education is the education that advocates continuous learning, where every individual is regarded as learner, though in different perspectives. It is also an education that provides a fresh beginning for learners, adds to the knowledge that has been previously acquired, promotes recurrent, continuing and lifelong learning, as well as changing the attitudes and views and opinions of the recipients (Omolewa, 2006). By this view, the author establishes the complexity of learning opportunities for individual's advancement irrespective of previous knowledge in a wide range programmes provided in adult education.

Opportunity for advancement makes it possible for the generality of all, thus, paving way for an inclusive education. This education provides meaningful learning opportunities for all students within the regular school system. It adopts a variety of strategies, initiatives, and procedures that work to realize everyone's right to a high-quality, suitable education (Stubbs, 2008). The idea of inclusive education is in conformity with the mandate of setting up the universal basic education (UBE) intended to offer every Nigerian child of school age an equal educational opportunity. The UBE Act holds that the educational programme must incorporate inclusiveness as a feature required in the implementation of the scheme. The Act further explains inclusiveness as a person in all manner and conditions of physical, special and psychological existence who is believed to benefit from the programme. Thus, introducing inclusive education is believed to aid in providing all learners with opportunities to learn and accept one another's abilities, talents, personalities and needs. It is a process for addressing and meeting the variety of needs of all students through boosting involvement in learning, cultures, and communities, as well as lowering exclusion from and within the educational system (UNESCO, 2005). Inclusive education involves changes and modifications in content, methodologies, and structures, and a united vision that



includes all children of the proper age range and the notion that it is the responsibility of the state to educate all children (UNICEF, 2013). This explains the role of the government in ensuring that every member of the society is provided with equal opportunity to learn.

Modification in contents and approaches among other features explain the pivotal role of adult education as a dynamic process that seeks to enable communities and systems to combat discrimination, celebrate diversity, and promote participation while overcoming barriers to learning for all people. The recognition of all in learning activities is further buttressed in goal four of the sustainable development which ensures inclusive and equitable quality education that promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In this SDG, remind the readers the particular SDG you are referring to here. Since you have not mentioned SDG in full rendition, you need to do so and abbreviate thereafter. two concepts were identified, quality education and lifelong learning. Quality education tends to look at five parameters which comprise healthy learners, conducive environments; relevant curricula; child-friendly pedagogy; and useful outcomes (UNICEF, 2000). It is the education of the whole child – the social, emotion, mental physical and cognitive development regardless of race or socioeconomic status. The other concept which is lifelong learning is directly related to adult education. Quality education involves all activities that are integrated in the operation with the aim of meeting educational goals and objectives. Consequently, it is seen as contributing to the creation of a learning society, where every individual, has an opportunity to learn, fully participate in sustainable development processes and enhance solidarity among people and communities.

Participation in the learning process by every category of learner is premised on the flexibility of the learning mode which consists of formal, non-formal and informal. Thus, adult education is an education that provides various learning opportunities to all individuals, level, class, age and affiliations notwithstanding, in a more convenient and flexible manner. It is an educational activity purported at remedying earlier education defects through its widening access strategy, acquire new skills, upgrade oneself vocationally; increase ones understanding of the world; and personality development (Omolewa, 2008; Seya, 2005 & Olori, 2015). Adult education recognises the fact that genuine development lies on awakening the consciousness of the individual without discrimination. It also presupposes that the multifaceted nature of adult education is believed to help in bridging the gap of inclusiveness through the provision of enabling learning environment and appropriate learning content. To this end, the chapter sets to x-ray the contributions of adult education in bridging the gap of inclusiveness. To achieve this purpose, the chapter looks at the objectives and importance of adult education, adult education for inclusiveness. It also considers the challenges of adult education for inclusiveness, suggestions as well as conclusion.



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## Objectives and Importance of Adult Education

Broadly speaking, every individual irrespective of previous knowledge and social inclination has an idea of what constitutes an adult education. In fact, the quest in the provision of meaning has apparently made it an interesting discourse to arrive at perhaps a concise meaning to accommodate all categories of people. The debate is even more interesting considering that definitions from both the elite and uneducated in the society point to two key concepts as adult and learning. Thus, delineating these concepts is believed to help in facilitating the understanding of adult education. However, deducing from these views by different categories of people has given rise to 'who' and 'what' constitute an adult.

Adult is a generic term that has been explained in various social contexts and geographical locations. Within the Nigerian context, one is regarded as an adult if and only when he has attained the age of 18. This view recognises the involvement and participation of the individual in politics. This further explains the political parameter of an adult. Other parameters used in distinguishing adult include chronological, psychological, and social, among others (Jegede, 2015). Looking at these parameters closely, one may say that maturity and responsibilities are features associated with adult. Succinctly, one may conclude that an adult is one who is believed to be mature and responsible in a given society. On the other hand, 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, organisations and societies (UNESCO & UIL, 2016).

Adult education offers opportunities for individual's improvement and integration into the society. It is saddled with the responsibility of taking education to the marginalised, disadvantaged, nomad, physically challenged among others. Adult education constitutes remedying early education inadequacies as well as transmitting the process of general, technical or vocational knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which take place out of the formal education system. The flexibility in learning opportunities allows everyone access lifelong learning opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge and skills while gaining the advantage of actively participation in the societies, regardless of their gender, age, race, ethnicity, or disability. This includes immigrants, indigenous peoples, children, and youth, especially those in vulnerable situations (UNESCO, 2015). This recommendation recognises adult education as not only learner-centered but a learning entity towards the self-development of all categories of learners. Hence, adult education becomes a vehicle of meeting the needs of learners while addressing the educational and social disadvantage. The goals of mass literacy, adult and non-formal education are thus:



- i. Provide functional basic education for adults and youths who never had the advantage of formal education or who left school too early. The target groups include migrant folks, almajiri pupils, illiterate and semi-literate adults, youths and adolescents; persons who left the formal school system early and are now willing to come back and continue schooling; and other categories of disadvantaged groups who are unable to have access to the convectional educational system and therefore require other forms of educational programmes to cater for their particular/peculiar needs and circumstances;
- ii. Provide remedial and lifelong education for youth and adults who did not complete secondary education, and
- iii. Provide in-service, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professional in order to improve their skills (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

The above objectives clearly identify the various categories of people whose educational opportunities should be accommodated to inculcate the right skills, knowledge and competencies required to be productive and actively participate in the development of their societies. More so, these individuals (marginalised, disadvantaged, physically challenged among others) are sometimes denied of learning opportunities owing to some factors such as religion, culture and nature of work. People with disabilities include persons who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, when combined with other obstacles, may prevent them from fully and equally participating in society (UNICEF,2013). This presupposes that disability is a socio-political construct that inherently exists systematically to exclude and discriminate people with disabilities in the society. Designing a suitable adult education programme is therefore said to address the needs, thereby filling the gap for inclusiveness. However, in a survey conducted, it was reported that out of 96 countries that participated in adult learning and education, majority of the marginalised were found to have been denied access; and a decrease in participation for vulnerable groups such as adults with disabilities and residents in remote or rural areas (UNESCO, 2015). The implication of this study is either that the programme may not have addressed their needs or was designed without taking into cognisance the peculiarities of the people, hence the poor participation. A review of the programme invariably is said to incorporate these lapses for inclusiveness.

### **Adult Education for Inclusiveness**

Inclusiveness stems from a limitation, a lack and a gap that exists in a system. This paper sees this system as education. To guarantee that all students have access to the full range of educational and social possibilities offered by the school, inclusion entails a process of reform and restructuring of the school as a whole. Thus, the core of inclusive education system is the removal of barriers to participation for all learners (UNESCO, 2005).It is interesting to note that the



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foundation of this education is the idea that all learners, regardless of their cultural, socio economic, and educational backgrounds, should have equal learning chances in all sorts of schools (UNESCO, 2009). Inclusive education therefore attempts to provide learning opportunities to both children and young people with diverse backgrounds. It is a strategy that considers how to alter educational institutions and other settings for learning in order to accommodate the diversity of learners. It is a strategy that considers how to alter educational institutions and other settings for learning in order to accommodate the diversity of learners.

While the development of an inclusive education system for all was affirmed in the United Nations Convention on the rights of people with disabilities, it was reported that the proportion of disabled children attending school is estimated between 1% and 5% in developing countries (UNESCO, 2009). It is not surprising to see students with special needs in Nigeria as constituting a great task of learning problem. To address this menace, it was recommended that exceptional children should receive free education at all levels and that special needs students should be integrated into mainstream schools (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). This invariably explains the essence of the Universal Basic Education in the provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigeria child of school age. Interestingly, the uniqueness of the programme is evident on features such as inclusiveness and special attention. Inclusiveness encompasses a person in all manners and conditions of physical, special and psychological existence, while special attention involves the recognition of all sectors of the population.

Inclusive education encapsulates changing the structures, processes, policies, practices, and cultures in schools and other educational institutions. It is a progressive increase in the participation of students in reduction of their exclusion from the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools (Okwudire & Okechukwu, 2018). Progressive increase stems from the notion of continuous learning which is advocated in adult education. As a functional human activity, adult education is directed at providing the necessary skills and competencies for active participation of individuals in the society. This accounts for its place in Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 that recommended the expansion and improvement of comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in one of the sixth goals. Inclusion, therefore entails a continuous process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners regardless of factors such as disability, gender, age, ethnicity, language, HIV status, geographical location and sexuality (UNESCO, 2011). Thus, the features and principles of inclusive education include:

1. it is right-based and follows the social model of disability. This model maintains that disability emanates from interactions between individual and community.
2. altering the system to align with the student, rather than changing the students to fit the system.



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3. acknowledging that learning begins at birth and continuous throughout life, and includes learning in the home and community, and in formal and non-formal education.
  4. dynamic process that is constantly evolving according to the local culture and context.
  5. seeking to enable communities, systems and structure combat discrimination, celebrate diversity, promote participation and overcome barriers to learning and participation for all people.
  6. acknowledging and respecting all differences according to age, gender, ethnicity, language, health status, economic status, religion, disability, life style and other forms of differences;
  7. widening strategy for the promotion of inclusive development with the goal of creating a world where peace, tolerance and social justice are not.

The above features reveal that adult education occupies a strategic place in inclusive education. For instance, in changing the system to fit the students, the need for active participation of learners is reiterated. This implies that in learning activities, learners should be seen as key players through their involvement in the learning process. Furthermore, continuous learning is considered as taking place in formal, non-formal and informal types. By this, adult education believes that a training receives at the formal system is limited in scope to effectively inculcate the appropriate skills and competencies for active participation in the society. Considering that the society is dynamic, continuous learning is necessary for adaptation. To this end, adult education is seen as an important tool capable of tackling social and economic inequality, reducing poverty, preparing global society for new paradigms of sustainable production and consumption, training skilled labour for competitive economics, creating the basis for a culture of peace and conviviality, establishing more harmonious relationships between human and natural environments, and developing the potential of all people (UNESCO, 2009). This education aims at equipping the people with the necessary capabilities to exercise and realise their rights, while taking control of their destinies. By promoting personal and professional development, adult education is said to foster sustainable and inclusive economic growth for individuals.

Identifying adult education in the above feature is also seen in terms of combating discrimination in a system. This stems from the fact that every individual is unique, as such individual differences should be acknowledged in all learning activities to promote sense of belonging which is evident on boosting learner's morale in learning activities. Summarily, adult education is purported at preparing people for life and helping them to live more successfully (Olori, 2012). It adopts a humanistic and holistic approach to learning in order to bring about change in attitudes or behaviours. Undoubtedly, one could rightly say that adult education is an important element in inclusive education.

The challenges



Some of the challenges faced in bridging the gap for inclusiveness through adult education include:

1. Failures of the Universal Basic Education Act to give adequate recognition to adult and non formal education as a key sector of basic education.
2. Poor accessibility: most learners such as the disadvantaged in the society are hardly given the opportunity for learning as to improve their quality of life, develop their potentials and experience the joy of learning.
3. Poor mobilisation: in spite of the enormous adult education programmes capable of meeting varying needs of learners, resources are rarely made available to enlighten the hard to reach populace in the society.
4. Poor attitude of the target group: statistics have shown that the yearly intake of targeted groups has been abysmally low. Record further show that an average of 1.7 million learners out of 44 million projected learners had embraced the programmes.
5. Poor integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into existing programmes. The absence of ICT in most of the NFE has resulted to its poor awareness level to a wide range of learners in various locations.
6. Inadequate teaching and learning materials: the poor use of teaching aids makes the learning boring and non participatory, thus encouraging incessant withdrawal of those who may have enrolled into the programme.
7. Curriculum: the existing curriculum shows that the approach of teaching is more of the conventional, without adequately addressing the needs of marginalized or disadvantaged.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, the enormous contributions of adult education have been acknowledged in various facets. One of such areas is in the bridging of the gap of inclusiveness of disabilities in learning activities. Agreeably, the continuous search for inclusive education is premised on the restructuring of the educational structures and policies to accommodate all irrespective of challenges. To foster an egalitarian society where equal opportunities are accorded to learners, adult education through its multi-dimensional approach appears to provide a forum for discourse on the need for inclusivity of disabilities in learning activities.

### **Implications of Adult Education to Special Needs Education**

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 advocates the rights of every human being and that people are born free and equal in dignity and rights. This article states that everyone has the right to education which should at least be free and compulsory at least at the primary school level. This declaration among others forms the basis of agitation for the rights of all human being through the integration of inclusive education in the conventional school system which is advocated by adult education.



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Developing new structures, policies and systems where the challenged and gifted students are to compete with others in conventional system is believed to emanate from continuous search for quality education made possible through adult education.

A sense of belonging in the school system where learners are considered as key players to teaching learning process is conceived as a determinant for promoting a healthy learning environment with active participation of learners. Adult education therefore provides a forum for recognising the impacts of learners through the integration of appropriate teaching methods characterised by mutual relationship between the learners and facilitators.

### **Suggestions**

The followings suggestions are put forward for the effective bridging of gap for inclusiveness through adult education

1. Infusing appropriate teaching styles that will accommodate the needs of all learners.
2. Developing adult education programmes with special attention to the disadvantaged such as the physically challenged, nomads, rural dwellers, rural women, out of school children among others.
3. Increasing awareness on the need for incorporating policies and contents of special needs education to adult education programmes to enhance participation of various categories of learners.
4. Funds should as a matter of urgency be released for the training of facilitators and the procurement of materials for effective adult education delivery.

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