

# Adult Literacy Uncovered and the Need for Equal Educational Opportunity for All

Muhammad Alkali

*Department of Adult Education and Extension Services, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, Nigeria*

**Abstract:-**Nigeria is signatory to the universal declaration on human rights which listed among other things the right to educate as one of the fundamental right of citizens. Right from our national policy on education to the government and societies general attitudes to special adults in the literary arrangement, there is a glaring deficiency and lack of commitment in carrying these segments of our neglected society along. Available statistics shows that the segment accounts for over 25 million, which shows that this mass of citizens had all this while been neglected, abandoned and prevented from contributing to the socio economic development of the nation, rather they are made of no relevance and a menace to the society, to the shame of a great country like Nigeria. This paper therefore seeks to draw the attention of government, the society and all concerned to the need to redress this anomaly and rather turn this ugly trend to the benefit of those concerns and the nation in general.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Literacy is recognised as a basic human right and an essential condition for human development. And analysis from a sample survey of developing countries indicates that increases in literacy contribute to increase in investment and output per worker. Literacy is as well as nutrition and income was found to correlate with increase life expectancy and reduce infant and maternal motility. Overall differences in patterns of education of educational investments, especially at the basic level are significant in explaining differences in National rates of economic growth and other development indicators.

Every segment of the society is therefore expected to get one form of literacy or the other for self-development and positive contribution to the economy.

Consequently, anything in the contrary is a denial of the fundamental human rights as enshrined in the declaration of human rights.

In our country Nigeria, a particular segment is either through omission or commission been neglected and relegated to the background in the provision of literacy. The segment is the special adults in the adult literacy programmes.

This development has not only brought hardship to the group but has retarded our economic growth and brought shame to the nation. There is therefore need for a reversal as this paper is advocating.

### **What is Adult Literacy?**

Literacy is a dynamic concept, formerly understood as just reading, writing and basic numeracy, the concept has been enlarged to encompass a whole range of more complex and a diverse skill and understanding (UNESCO 2006).

The Global Monitoring Report (20016) defines literacy as a “contextually bound continuum of reading, writing and numeracy developed through the leaning and application, in school and in other settings appropriates to youths and adult”.

Therefore, adult literacy is a process of providing learning activities for youths and adults who were not opportune to undergo the conventional system of schooling.

It can also be understood as process that focuses on imparting reading, writing, numeral and oral skills and thereby emphasising cognitive abilities, independence of social context in which such are acquired and used. As such it seen as a single autonomous skill that is indispensable component of social and economic development in society.

## II. IMPLEMENTATION OF ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMMES

Most literacy programmes in Africa focuses on the provision of basic or rudimentary skills of reading, writing and numeracy, but there are differences with regards to who designed the programmes and how the content responds to the listeners needs. (UNESCO 2006).

By this outlook is responsive and context specific multi-dimension lifelong learning process designed to equip beneficiaries with specialized knowledge, skills, attitude and techniques to independently engage in practice involving listening, speaking, reading writing, numeracy, technical functioning and critical thinking required on real life.

While government is making effort at getting the special adults educated. The scope, approach and coverage are still not comprehensive enough. Teaching and basically lacking and a greater percentage seem to be forgotten. These are the special adults: conegative estimates put persons with disabilities to between 500 and 600 nationwide. 80% to 90% of whom live in poverty in underdeveloped and developing countries, where Nigeria falls into.

This figure paints a very pathetic picture of the neglect this special adults face in our country, where almost is

done to give them a worthwhile literacy programme. The World report on disability, published in 2011, said **about 25 million** Nigerians had at least one disability, while 3.6 million of these had very significant difficulties in functioning. Adult education should by now embrace modern innovations like inclusive education together, wherever possible, regardless of differences. Inclusive education therefore acknowledges that every learner has unique characteristics, interest abilities and learning needs.

Those with special needs must have access to and be accommodated at the general education system. Inclusive education takes into account the diversities among learners, seeks to combat discriminatory attitudes, and creates welcoming communities, achieve education for all as well as improve the quality and effectiveness of literacy programmes.

This, then means that people with special needs like the Special Adults should not be seen as “problem to be fixed” but should be responded to positively and their deficiencies and differences seen as opportunities to enrich the learning programme for all as enshrined in the universal declaration of Human rights.

The United Nations General Assembly in ninth resolutions 16/106 adopted the convention of the rights of persons with disabilities (Disability Convention) unambiguously recognised the link between inclusive education and the rights to education of persons with disabilities in its article 24 as follows:

*“states parties recognise the right of the person with disabilities to education. With the view of realizing the right without discrimination and the basis of equal opportunity, states parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning.”*

In Nigeria, special adults suffers a lots of set backs, and discrimination apart from the faulty literacy programmes, in designed and implementation, different governmental bodies the ministry of education are giving the responsibility of this educational programme. In some cases you have them under the ministries of health, and that of social development youth and sports etc. The end result is neglected and poor programmes implementation.

The planning and execution of literacy programmes for these Special Adults should carry the special adults, the community and government along and not leave them in the hands of government alone.

These Special Adults should be made to enjoy available, accessible and adequate education on equal basis with others. Their basic needs like access to sign language and Braille and other special requirements to be provided and modernized to suit their needs.

#### Challenges

- a. There is a deep rooted negative attitude and values towards people with disabilities, especially the

adults. Their basic learning needs are almost absent, their teachers will ill-equipped and in most cases untrained etc

- b. Poor funding of their programmes is another challenge. Adequate provision of funds is never made to cater for their special needs while learning.
- c. Lack of statistical data. In the country there is no statistical information on the special adults. Where data is lacking, then there will be faulty planning and implementation of their programmes.

#### *The Benefits of Adult Literacy Programme*

In order to improve lives, people need to be involved in the development process, they should be assisted to define their need and involved in the planning, organizing and implementing of programme that meet them that can only be achieved when we are literate.

Adult Literacy play important roles in peacebuilding and state-building efforts, both of which are integral to global security. Research has long shown the impacts of conflict and state weakness on education but increasingly evidence is emerging on the constructive role education can play in peacebuilding and state-building (Agenda in Education in Fragile State 2017)

Literacy is a source of economic equity and identity, essential for creative citizen participation and sustainable development, (UNESCO 1997)

According to Sarumi (1996) for any nation to develop socially, economically, politically, and in a spheres of human endeavours, therefore there is need to liberate the citizen from traditional forms of beliefs, attitudes and practices through functional literacy programmes.

Developing countries including Nigeria are now aware of the facts that literacy education for all is the only way to effect positive changes in the community, once a national population is predominantly literate.

The benefits of adult’s literacy can further be summarized as follows:

- Literacy encourages citizen participation in government policies and programmes.
- It aids memory and senses of reasoning
- Assist in documentation and easy record keeping
- Helps in verification
- Stimulates thinking
- Aids invention and innovations
- It helps in transmission of ideas, values, and commitment
- It makes one independent persons, being able to communicate to ones children without anyone knowing the content of the lesson and being able to make bank transactions without any hindrance.
- It kills ignorance
- It helps to allow secrecy

- It allows cooperatives and sense of togetherness
- It helps adults to have access to information
- The development of critical awareness.

Lastly literacy will make the rural dwellers to understand the importance of cooperatives societies. Middle men can now be avoided in the farmer through the consumer cooperatives or producer cooperatives, now purchase fertilizers direct from government, these fertilizers when applied to their crops leads to bumper harvest.

#### *Adult Literacy Uncovered*

Education in Nigeria is an instrument “per excellence” for effective national development. The National Policy on Education is the guiding principles and compendium for the educational system of the country. Selection 7 page 36-38 and item 74 to item 79 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of 1998 and revised edition of 2004 is the portion where policy statement of “Mass Literacy Adult and Non-formal education “is made but, there is no part of these documents that states a provision for literacy of Special Adults, by Special Adults in these area, am referring to those below:

- Adults and youths with vision impairments (the blinds)
- Adults and youth are deaf and hard hearing
- Adult and youth with mental retardation
- Adult and youth with learning disorder
- Adults and youth with physical disabilities
- Adult and youth who are gifted and talented

However, section 8 of the same material titled ‘Special Education’ a provision was for children with special problems states that:

*Special education is the education of children and adults who have learning difficulties because of different kinds of handicaps-blindness, Partial-sightedness, deafness, hardness-of-hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, limb, deformity to malformation etc. due to circumstances of birth, inheritance social position, mental and physical health pattern or accident in later life. As a result, such children and adults are unable to cope with the regular schools class organization and methods.*

#### **A contradiction statement follows that**

*“In accordance to prevailing government policy to provide Equal educational opportunities fir all children special Education shall be provided for the two Categories of Children with special needs”.*

The point this paper is stressing is that no educational provision/programmes is made for adults to learn basic rudiments of reading writing and numeracy non-formally.

A survey into report and activities of National Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-formal Education and the 36 states Agencies for Mass Education and Federal Capital Territory shows various literacy activities and programmes as shown below:

- Basic Literacy
- Post Literacy
- Functional Literacy
- Vocational training
- Continuing Education
- Prison Education
- Nomadic Literacy
- Non-formal Quranic Literacy Programme
- Extra mural studies and
- Non-formal Girl child Literacy (Aderinoye 2005)

By UNESCO report of 2017 there was 25 million Special Adult nationwide in Nigeria. These magnitude and population should not miss educational opportunities in term of adult literacy, considering its impact on national development.

### III. THE WAY FORWARD AND THE NEED FOR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

For equity, justice and for our nation to develop socially and economically, full access to literacy must be considered an imperative. The President of Mexico, Vincente Fox Quesade, pointed out forcefully during his inaugural address at the 6<sup>th</sup> (ministerial revival meeting in Monterrey, Mexico on 14 February 2006, when he declared that education for all is the dream of every humanist and those “who are genuinely concerned with the present and future of human kind”(Omolewa 2006)

To enable us move forward, we must also draw attention to the universal declaration of ‘Human Right’ which listed the right to education as one of the fundamental rights of a citizen. The study on education in sub-Sahara African commissioned by World Bank endorsed the provision of education as a right and the publication noted that without education, development will not occur. Only an educated people can command the skills necessary for sustainable economic growth and for a better quality of the (UNESCO 2015).

The 2015 Education for all Global Monitoring Report states that the world declaration remains as;

*Every person; child, youth and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. The needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression numeracy and problems solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, said attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity to participate fully in development, to*

*improve the quality of their lives to make infirmed decisions and to continue learning. The scope for basic learning needs and how they should meet various individual countries and cultures and inevitably changes with passage of time.*

It is therefore important to provide equal opportunity for learning of these exempted 18.7 million Nigerians from learning package.

#### IV. RECOMMENDATION

Literacy of special adults should be properly managed, administered, and implemented in accordance with basic human rights to education. In this light, modern trend should be adopted, like the use of the required learning tools and aids, conclusive an adaptable learning environment, embracing inclusive education fully and take the training and retraining of the required manpower very seriously.

Communities, the special adults themselves and government should partner in the planning and execution of literacy programmes for these special adults.

All forms of stigmatisation and discrimination should be eliminated as to help special adults maintain their dignity and self esteem so as to contribute their quota to national development.

Regular and proper statistics should be kept aiding for the planning and budgetary provision for these special adults.

Another look should be taken at the legislations aimed at ensuring the rights of these special adults should be centralised and under the parent Ministry of Education.

If these recommendations are investigated, then the much talked about equal opportunities for all will have been realised and no area will remain uncovered.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Literacy is recognised as basic human right and an essential condition for human development. In Nigeria it is realised that the special adults are excluded from the provision of the adult literary programmes. This exclusion is not only a

violation of their human right but also a set back in the economic development of the nation.

In response to this, a strengthening partnership of the “Human Rights” and disability movements has promote the educative paradigm now generally known and referred to as “Inclusive Education”.

The education provision of this group of citizens require special learning materials such as Brail machines, hearing aids and well-trained facilitators to handle the teaching and leaning process.

It is my contention in this paper that if the nation must catch with the rest of the world development wise then full access to education for all must be made available and imperative. Only an educated person can command the skills necessary for sustainable economic growth and better quality for life for all.

#### REFERENCES

- [1]. World Development Index Report 2017; Population of person with disability, Nigerian disable population report Nigeria; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>
- [2]. A New Agenda for Education in Fragile States 2017, Reports. World Conference on Education for All. Declaration on Education for all and frame work for action to meet the basic learning needs.
- [3]. UNESCO 2016 Convening of the Sixty International Conference on Adult Education, executive Boar paper, Retrieved on 30-10-2017 from <http://www.unesco.org/en/courier/Education>.
- [4]. International Conference on the Right to Basic Education as Fundamental Human Right and the Legal Right and the Legal Frame Work for its Financing, Yakarta Indonesia.
- [5]. 1<sup>st</sup> December 2005 Reports. World Conference on Education for All. Jomtie 1990 Declaration on Education for all and frame work for action to meet the basic learning needs.
- [6]. Omolewa M. 2006 Cross Over unto the other side valedictory lecture. Delivered at University of Ibadan, Spectrum Books Ltd Ibadan
- [7]. <http://www.unesco.org/en/courier/Education> on 30/10/2007. Speech by president Vicente Fox Quesade at the inauguration of the E (Ministerial Reviews Meeting in Monetary Mexico) February 14 2006.
- [8]. Aderinoye R.A (2002) Literacy Assessment Practice (LKAP) in selected developing countries, Nigeria Case Study ILI/UNESCO expert meeting Retrieved on 30-October-2007 from <http://www.unesco.org/en/courier/Education>.
- [9]. National Policy on education 3<sup>rd</sup> Education Federal Republic of Nigeria (1998) NERDC Yaba Lagos Nigeria.
- [10]. Kolo I. (2002) Meeting the Adult Educational Need of Society groups in Society, invited paper for the Arewa House on Revitalizing Adult Education in Northern Nigeria.