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**IMPROVING QUALITY EDUCATION AMONG ADULT LEARNERS  
FOR DECENT WORK AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:  
IMPLICATIONS ON LIVING STANDARDS**

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**Abstract**

The Nigerian education system has been a controversial issue for discussion; this was occasioned for the fact that through education, different problems such as economical, political and social issues and many others besieging humanity in several aspects of their lives could be addressed. Even when education has failed to receive adequate attention from the powers that be, education still remains the only way out to promote sustainable economic development, political and social well being of the society. A critical observation revealed that increase in the number of schools in Nigeria will not guarantee or provide required education that will lead to desired sustainable economic development in this 21<sup>st</sup> century for self reliance, but through the consideration of education and its quality capable of providing knowledge and skills, techniques and information for wealth creation to move the country to the next level. This paper assessed the level of adult learning and education activities in Nigeria that will provide decent work for wealth creation and sustainable development for the teeming population of this country which will enable them contribute meaningfully in their society especially in this fast growing world.

**Keywords:** Education, Adult learning and Education, Work and Sustainable development.

**Introduction**

Education is seen as a veritable tool for bringing about socio-cultural, political and economic growth; an instrument used for developing human cognitive, affective, psychomotor and psycho-productive domains achievable through a teaching and learning process. All over the world, education can be assumed to be the most important instrument for change, viewed as a fundamental right of an individual aptly enshrined in several international frameworks. Education enables individuals to fit into the society based on their abilities, interest and needs. However, a right to education is an enabling right to build most national legislation as well as catalyst for positive societal change, development, social justice and peace. Education is achievable through formal or informal processes; education is regarded as a formal process when it takes place in an organized setting, also an informal process when it goes on in the home, work places and other areas in the society without specific instruction being given.

**Education**

Education is defined as a process through which societies deliberately transmit its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from generation to generation (Okechukwu, Nwabani and Ogbonnaya, 2020). In addition, Okechukwu, Nwabani and Ogbonnaya further stated that education is the total training of an individual leading to the development of mind and personality including self concept. The implication is that self concept determines self actualization. Gerur (2017) stated that education as a concept can be viewed from three dimensions, the process, product and discipline. The process of education deals with the transmission, preservation, development and advancement of the people's culture. The discipline aspect of education is seen as a body of knowledge such as what those things to be taught and learnt are and why it is worthy to be taught, what ways should it be taught including the category of people that will benefit from it? The most important benefits of education is that it improves personal lives and also help the society to be run smoothly, provide her citizen with knowledge, skills, techniques and information that will enable them know their rights and duties to their families, the society they belong and the nation in general.

In addition, Amaele in Ugwu, (2015) defined education as

*the total development of the individual through an established acceptable methods and techniques based on the abilities and intents to make up the socio-economic and political needs of the society and equip the individual with opportunities to take the rightful place and become useful citizen and contribute meaningfully to the development of his society.*

Amaele further stated that etymologically, the word education was derived from two Latin words “Educare” and “Educere”. Educare simply means to train, form and mould individual to achieve his or her aspirations, Educere means to build, to lead or to develop. It is mostly favored by humanists who argue that the function of education is to develop natural potentialities in an individual so that the individual concerned can function effectively in the society. In the work of Hanushek, (2007), it has been observed that it takes little analysis to understand that education levels differ dramatically between developing and developed countries and natural to believe that productive development strategy would be to raise the schooling levels of the population; this implies that education is the heart of national development and source of quality human capital that will move any nation to the next level, Nigeria for instance.

There is this observation that Nigerian educational system is seen to be abysmally low in terms of quality and a little of quantity. The observation was made and strengthened by UNICEF publications of 2018 which confirmed that there is poor performance in the Nigeria education system with regards to quantity and quality, thus resulting that more than 10.5 million children were discovered and recorded to be out-of-school children in 2008 as captured by (Fleet, Watkins and Gerubel in Adeniran et al, 2020). The authors further illustrated that most to be worried about was that this level of educational challenge seems to be one of the highest so far recorded globally, and that government has recorded about 58.3% as the statistical population of children without basic literacy and numeracy skills; which is never a credit to the country's education system. In order to achieve the ambitious target set for SDG, it demands that the level of education and its quality be improved. Ugwu, (2015) stated that in attempt to improve the need for education, the federal government after gaining her independence in the sixties attached serious importance to educational knowledge acquisition as a priority and its quality a vital tool for national development. In his remark, Thom-Otuya and Inko-Tarah (2016) stated that available records show that government made tremendous efforts to improve plans for education acquisition through the introduction of different educational programmes to alleviate educational challenges in the country. Some of the programmes include Universal Primary Education (UPE), Free Primary Education (FPE) and Universal Basic Education (UBE) among others. Idris (2013) added that government fashioned out the national policy on Education as part of the Post-African Educational Reforms which aimed at making education an essential ingredient for nation building efforts for the newly independent African state for purposes of employment and wealth creation. These policies fashioned that every country owes it as a duty and obligation to make life more meaningful, cheap and comfortable for every member of her citizen.

#### **Adult Learning and Education**

In addition to making life good and sustainable for members of the citizens, government equally embarked on another developmental programme of activities which includes the political development, social-economic, religious, cultural, technological and educational development programme etc. for the interest of the people. More so, Onyenemezu, (2012) captured that providing opportunities for all members of the citizen to learn and acquire sustainable skills adults not excluded, will definitely increase the level of manpower and service the economy on the basis of rewarding adult population. These programmes and abilities were targeted to address the well-being of the citizenry and ensure increase in the achievement of education for all including the adult population by employing adult learning and education programme. Adult learning and education programme emerged as a result to the world economic crises in 2009 when representatives of 144 UNESCO member states met in Brazil for the sixth international conference in Adult education (CONFITEA, VI) and adopted the Belen Framework for Action (BFA) to guide them in harnessing the power and potentials of adult learning and education for viable future for all. The conference called upon UNESCO and satellite structures to review and update recommendation on the development of adult education as adopted by the UNESCO general assembly in 1976. The conference finally replaced this recommendation on adult learning and education embraced by UNESCO general assembly in 2015. The general assembly of 2015 came up with a broad definition of what adult learning and education encompasses. However, it was discovered that adult learning and education equip people with the necessary capabilities to realize their destinies, promotes personal and professional development by

supporting active engagement of adults within their societies, communities and environments. It fosters sustainable and inclusive economic growth and decent work prospects for individuals, a crucial tool for alleviating poverty, improving health and well-being and contributing to sustainable learning societies (Milana, Halford, Hedge, Wallerand Webb, 2017)

Adult learning and education in Nigeria includes instrument for projecting the Nigerian population worldwide through information and communication technologies (ICT) and serve as a decisive tool for smooth integration of Nigerians economy into global economy. Onyenemezu, (2012) further stated that the use of internet has been beneficial in mobilizing people globally at the grassroots level to take a common stand on global issues of common concern. In his submission, Nzeneri (2010) added that our 21<sup>st</sup> century generation is characterized by an upsurge of information technology which dictates the place of development and technology transfer, and also a century where communication and infrastructural facilities such as telephone, fax and computer is tool for turning our world into global place. It is also a veritable platform through which the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century such as bad governance, insecurity, and incivility and others can adequately be addressed. Adult learning and education is vital in reaching all the sustainable development goals and many of their targets. Akpotowohand Amali, (2016) affirmed that participants in any adult learning programme need to be equipped with requisite entrepreneurial skill to have decent work in which they will be established and make them be part of their countries economic development, therefore from the knowledge, skills and opportunities acquired adult learners bridge challenging gap within their society's socio-economic environments.

Employers of labour attached to different levels and sectors of the economy are provided with qualified learned personnel predominantly adults who have the privilege and opportunities to increase educational acquisition in the society they belong. In addition, Onyenemezu (2012) cited a report from one time director general of UNESCO as indicated in Omolewa 1985 stated as follows:

*it is not the children of today that hold the present destiny of Africa in their hands, instead it is the adults. So it is only by establishing effective communication with the adult population, and helping them to adjust to the rapidly changing world that an immediate impact be made on urgent problems of the society and essential progress to be brought.*

More so, Ehazu cited in Onyenemezu, (2012) stated that adult populations are those occupying most of the production sector of our economy and not the children. Children are by their education meant for the future. Therefore, providing education for all including the adults will avail members of the citizen opportunities to be self reliant, have decent work and oblige those opportunities for wealth creation as to contribute meaningfully to the development of their society. Acquisition of education and its quality according to Weinberg, (2010) is an unavoidable component of any dignified work and the society of knowledge. As an instrument for productivity and competitiveness, education is a prerequisite for economic efficiency that generates quality employment and condition for access to permanent work. Education and quality not only can be described as an end to itself but equally for acquiring decent work for wealth creation especially for working adults. The statement is in line with 'Platos' philosophical words as captured by Patrinos, (2016) which says that "If a man neglects education, he walks lame to the end". More so the author stated that James Heckman, a neurologist affirmed that "learning can be continued into advanced age and that investment in more able worker at any age generates high return than investment in less able worker", investing in adult learner via adult education has payoff in terms of higher wages.

The above framework necessitated understanding of the term adult learner; which could be described as those adult participants willing to learn and they are exposed to adult learning programme. Akpotowohand Amali, (2016) affirmed that participants in any adult learning programme need to be equipped with requisite entrepreneurial skill and educational knowledge to have decent work for employment and wealth creation. It is the most extended component of lifelong learning necessary for democratic and inclusive sustainable society, supports the development of values such as learning to live together, peace and tolerance and a critical tool for preventing extremism, cooperation and promoting active citizenship for decent work. The definition of adult learner was denoted to include those adults who are engaged in the acquisition of educational knowledge with the intention of having the ability to identify, understand, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contents at the end of their programme. (Ferdinand, Williams and Orlu, 2019). In line with the above instance, adult learner can be understood as that adult individual who is desired to acquire quality education by applying consistent efforts and showing commitments to

their academic works with the hope of acquiring necessary qualification that will fetch them decent work for employment, thus contributing to the economy.

### **Work**

Work is a fundamental aspect expected in the life of an individual. It is not only a form of substance and satisfaction for basic needs of human beings, it is also a vehicle for person to reassert their own dignity, occupy a productive place and feel useful to the society and the family (Somavia, 2001). The author stated that people do not just want a trade that will enable them to survive in constant anxiety, but they want decent work in adequate condition enabling them to enjoy a minimum of social protection. The society needs work that will guarantee their fundamental human rights, building on that respect a transparent social dialogue, work that will be instrumental for their permanent betterment, and place for developing their capabilities to enabling them compete in the labor market and to keep abreast with technological qualifications. However, it will be necessary for workers to be attuned with the technological evolution of their work so that they themselves are more creative and sufficient. Patrinos, (2016) stated that investment the society make in training and retraining and constant improvement of its labor force is a prediction for its capacity to life into a globalised economy. Acquisition of education and its quality will serve as a moral rectitude to the individuals and the society for the purpose of having good life, interest, social imperatives and rights of working person's dignity for sustainable development. Work is viewed as a productive work under condition of freedom, equity, security in which rights are protected for adequate remuneration with social coverage provided. Also it is the frame wherein both needs be met through vocational; this implies that training and development of workers skill and competences is a good dimension of good work for sustainability.

### **Sustainable development**

Sustainable development is the ability to maximize the net benefit of economic development subject to maintain or enhance the service of natural resources overtime. In addition Erica, Ernesto and Andrea (2020) captured that while MDGs were primarily focused on developing countries, the sustainable development goals cover all the countries of the world, thus forming 2030 agenda. It represents a major advance as a cosmopolitan proposal for a global idea, an agenda of universal validity, not limited to the poorest countries. It is also a way by which the society is been managed in an efficient and effective manner so that it benefits everyone in the society with enough resources still available for the continuation of human race (Sofoluwe, 2013). According to Wikipedia (2011), sustainable development seeks to support people through empowerment participation of all stakeholders, social mobility, cultural identity and other different instructional development. The term sustainable development is a development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs (Sofoluwe, 2013). The author further stated that sustainable development maintain the planet by improving the state of ecosystem, biodiversity conservation, ensuring adequate carrying capacity and responding in sustainable manners to other global issues.

However, the United Nations (1987) used the concept sustainable development to meet the needs of the present without considering the ability of the future generation meeting up their needs, cultural needs, environmental protection needs and their social developmental needs among others. Sustainable development will only be useful when it leads to the welfare of the ordinary man, to give social protection, generate decent work that provide good living wage and workers rights in the best way to promote the three components of sustainable development which includes social cohesion, environmental sustainability and economic development (Erika, Ernesto, Andrea, 2020). Meanwhile, the level of education in Nigeria determines the level of her manpower and their productive capacity. Adult learning and education is vital in reaching all the sustainable development goals and its targets. Sustainable development goal especially goal '4' is the education goal with the target of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education. It promotes lifelong learning for all. The goal has about ten targets of which the 1<sup>st</sup> target is to ensure free primary and secondary education for girls and boys towards completing their education that will lead to relevant and effective learning outcome. Even when the goal has about ten targets, but the target '4' aimed at ensuring increase in the number of youths and adults, have relevant skills including technical and vocational education.

According to Adeniran, et al, (2020) our cross-country and regional analysis shows that the national government have been making discernable progress in designing policy framework aligned with the sustainable development goal agenda, and as well as recognizing the importance of not leaving the vulnerable behind. It was further captured by the author that the world economic forum

WEF in 2018 ranked Nigeria as no 124<sup>th</sup> out of 137 countries in terms of education quality, records available implies that the country is coming up gradually to meet up the targeted sustainable development goals. However, the context of this paper is on education for employment and wealth creation for sustainable development, therefore emphases will be based on the acquisition of education by the adults for sustainable development. Since the concept of education has been described as an institution through which society provide her members with important knowledge including basic facts, job skills, cultural norms and values, education therefore remains the key enabler for sustainable growth and development across countries. According to Adeniran et al added that the 2030 agenda rightly recognize the ambitious goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable sustainable quality education to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all sustainable development goals, especially goal 4 which its objective move beyond the millennium development goals to focus on improving quantity through broadening access to education. It is against this backdrop that education and its quality be viewed as priority and most required in all facets of life to achieve sustainable economic development.

### **Summary**

However, observation shows that education and training are essential elements needed for decent work and a condition to promote sustainable development in Nigeria, The situation of Nigeria educational system and quality is more worrisome as her policy is more focused on quantitative than qualitative education. Government is bent on increasing the number of higher institution in the country without considering their carrying capacity as to produce quality personnel to create good employment. Learners' and their learning condition with budget allocation to the existing institutions were not giving adequate attention. Equally the attention given to adult learning and education as an academic programme remains pathetic because educators or facilitators who train the adult learners are not recognized. As much as education has been described as the driven force and the key to human development, with the world becoming a global village, education will help to break down stereotype ideas and reduce prejudice, injustice, deprivation and oppression. Therefore, providing sustainable education to the adult learners through adult learning and education programme will restore sustenance, create employment opportunities, have decent work to promote economic growth of the country and meet up with the sustainable development goals.

### **Conclusion**

Education goes beyond what takes place within the four walls of the school, grouped into three forms, the formal, informal and non-formal education. For instance, a child acquires education from his experiences outside the school as well as from those within the school system; adult learners can also acquire education by interacting with friends and colleagues in their workplaces. With observation, there are three mechanisms through which education may affect economic growth, they include that (a) education increases human capital inherent in the labor force, which increase productivity and thus transitional growth towards equilibrium level of output, (b) education may increase the innovative capacity of the economy and the new knowledge on new technologies and processes of promoting growth and (c) that education may facilitate the diffusion and transmission of knowledge needed to understand and process new information and to successfully implement new technologies devised by others which again promotes economic growth. Education is basis for national development, and a review of adult learning and education in Nigeria can provide a bridge and veritable platform through which the promises and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can adequately be addressed. Obviously, the standard and the quality of educational system and its capacity to innovate determines the place of growth and sustainable economic development, which is concerned with the increase in the standard of living of the people towards the provision of quality education, security, employment opportunities, health facilities and availability of food.

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