

CURRICULUM REFORM IN THE ADULT AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL SECTOR FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF EDUCATIONAL GOALS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper advocates for a strategic overhaul of educational curricula as a pivotal means to achieve Adult and non-formal educational goals in Nigeria, in the ever-evolving landscape of learning. By critically examining the current state of educational systems, the paper contends that a proactive and intentional approach to curriculum reform is essential for equipping students with the skills necessary for success in the 21st century, within the context of shifting societal needs and technological advancements, the paper argues for a departure from traditional, rigid curricular structures. It asserts that an updated curriculum should prioritize not only subject-specific knowledge but also the development of critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and adaptability. The document draws attention to the inherent limitations of conventional curricula in addressing the dynamic demands of the modern workforce and contends that a redefined educational framework is imperative for cultivating a workforce that is resilient and innovative. Additionally, this positional paper engages with case studies and successful instances of curriculum reform, highlighting the impact of well-designed educational strategies on student outcomes. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, and industry representatives, in crafting and implementing effective reforms. In conclusion, this paper takes a firm stance in favor of curriculum reform as an indispensable catalyst for achieving educational goals. By presenting a compelling argument supported by evidence and real-world examples, the researchers argue that a strategic overhaul of educational curricula is crucial for achieving Adult and non-formal educational goals in Nigeria, given the evolving landscape of learning. They contend that the current educational systems are insufficient in equipping students with the skills needed for success in the 21st century, especially considering shifting societal needs and technological advancements. The paper suggests departing from traditional, rigid curricular structures and prioritizing the development of critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and adaptability. To support their argument, the researchers point out the limitations of conventional curricula in addressing the dynamic demands of the modern workforce. They advocate for a redefined educational framework that fosters resilience and innovation. They conclude by asserting that curriculum reform is indispensable for achieving educational goals and aim to influence policymakers and stakeholders towards embracing transformative changes in curriculum design. It aims to influence educational policymakers and stakeholders towards embracing transformative changes in curriculum design for the betterment of future generations.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and a catalyst for socio-economic development. In Nigeria, the adult and non-formal education sector holds pivotal significance, serving as a

conduit for individuals who may have missed out on formal education or seek further skills enhancement. Despite considerable efforts, this sector confronts a myriad of challenges hindering the realization of educational objectives. In response, curriculum reform emerges as an indispensable strategy to confront these obstacles and foster lifelong learning among adults. The term "reform" finds its roots in the Latin word "reformare," meaning "to shape." It encompasses a multifaceted process involving the identification of issues, formulation of remedies, adoption of new policies, and institutional changes. Education reform, expressed through various terms such as change, innovation, or renewal, constitutes deliberate endeavors to modify educational systems or programmes to address perceived social and educational deficiencies. As described by Adeniyi (2010), drawing from the works of Yusuff and Yusuff (2009) and Hans-Joachim (2022), education reforms are government-driven initiatives underpinned by a political analysis, aimed at effecting significant departures from prevailing educational practices.

In the context of this study, Adult and Non-Formal Education reforms encompass efforts to rectify shortcomings, address inconsistencies, and introduce contemporary methods or values into existing programmes. These reforms strive to enhance the efficacy and relevance of adult and non-formal education initiatives, ensuring their alignment with evolving societal needs and educational best practices. Literacy by Radio promotes reading, writing, and computing skills through radio broadcasts, facilitating Basic Education delivery to a wide audience across Nigeria. It aims to swiftly eradicate illiteracy by enhancing access to basic literacy for adult learners, regardless of age, gender, or socio-economic background.

The project includes baseline surveys, primer development, production manuals, and training for facilitators and radio producers. Radio programmes, initially in English, are adapted and broadcast nationwide. Evaluation is ongoing, with plans to expand coverage to all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. Literacy messages are integrated into various subjects, and primers are available in 19 local languages. Training for facilitators and radio producers has been completed, and programmes are broadcast in 30 states, showing progress towards project goals.

Adult and non-formal education in Nigeria serves as a system, aimed at addressing the educational needs of adults, workers and out-of-school youths. It covers a wide range of learning opportunities, including literacy programmes, vocational training, citizenship education, workers and trade union education and continuing education. The objective is to provide lifelong learning opportunities that enable individuals to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills, improve their livelihoods, and participate fully in the socio-economic development of the country.

Adult and Non-Formal Educations are critical components of lifelong learning that cater to individuals beyond the traditional schooling age or those who did not have access to formal education. These forms of education serve various objectives, which include:

1. **Providing Basic Literacy and Numeracy Skills:** Adult and Non-Formal Education programmes aim to equip individuals with fundamental literacy and numeracy skills necessary for functioning in society and engaging in further learning or employment opportunities.
2. **Offering Vocational and Skills Training:** These programmes often focus on providing vocational training and skill development to enhance employability and enable individuals to participate effectively in the workforce.

3. **Promoting Personal Development:** Adult and Non-Formal education also aim to foster personal development by offering opportunities for lifelong learning, enhancing self-esteem, and promoting critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.
4. **Addressing Social and Economic Inequalities:** By targeting marginalized groups and underserved communities, these programmes seek to address social and economic inequalities by providing educational opportunities that empower individuals to improve their circumstances and contribute to community development.
5. **Facilitating Civic Participation and Community Engagement:** Adult and non-formal education initiatives often include components aimed at promoting civic awareness, participation, and community engagement, thus fostering active citizenship and social cohesion.

However, despite these noble objectives, the actualization of these goals in practice often faces significant challenges. In many contexts, adult and non-formal education programmes suffer from inadequate funding, limited resources, insufficient infrastructure, and a lack of trained educators. Additionally, there may be cultural or societal barriers that hinder participation, especially among marginalized groups.

Furthermore, the curriculum and pedagogical approaches used in adult and non-formal education programmes may not always align with the evolving needs of learners or the demands of the modern workforce. Traditional curricula may focus too heavily on rote learning or outdated skills, failing to equip learners with the critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy skills essential for success in the 21st-century economy.

Some researchers argue that a strategic overhaul of educational curricula is crucial for achieving Adult and non-formal educational goals in Nigeria, given the evolving landscape of learning. They contend that the current educational systems are insufficient in equipping students with the skills needed for success in the 21st century, especially considering shifting societal needs and technological advancements. The paper suggests departing from traditional, rigid curricular structures and prioritizing the development of critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and adaptability. To support their argument, the researchers point out the limitations of conventional curricula in addressing the dynamic demands of the modern workforce. They advocate for a redefined educational framework that fosters resilience and innovation. The researchers emphasize the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, and industry representatives, in crafting and implementing effective reforms. They conclude by asserting that curriculum reform is indispensable for achieving educational goals and aim to influence policymakers and stakeholders towards embracing transformative changes in curriculum design. It aims to influence educational policymakers and stakeholders towards embracing transformative changes in curriculum design for the betterment of future generations.

Therefore, reforming Adult and Non-Formal Education is essential to address these challenges and better align these programmes with contemporary educational objectives and societal needs. Curriculum reform should prioritize the development of relevant and transferable skills, such as digital literacy, communication skills, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning competencies. Additionally, there should be a focus on creating flexible and inclusive learning environments that accommodate diverse learner needs and preferences.

Moreover, reform efforts should involve collaboration among stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, civil society organizations, employers, and community members. Adequate funding, professional development opportunities for

educators, and the use of innovative teaching methodologies and technologies are also critical components of successful reform initiatives.

Current State of Adult and Non-Formal Education in Nigeria:

Adult and non-formal education, as defined by researchers such as Aderinoye (1997) and Olayemi, Aromolaran, Ajayi, Okemakinde, and Gbenro (2016), refers to organized and sequential learning experiences tailored to meet the specific needs of adults. This form of education offers opportunities for adults to acquire essential skills necessary for daily activities, economic empowerment, and societal development.

The adult and non-formal education sector in Nigeria comprises various programmes targeting diverse learner groups, including out-of-school youths, illiterate adults, and marginalized populations. While the government and non-governmental organizations have implemented initiatives to expand access to education, significant gaps persist. These include low participation rates, inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and limited availability of relevant learning materials.

Adult and non-formal education as a discipline has undergone significant transformation. It has moved away from a narrow and pedantic discipline to bring into being vigorously active components like: Out-of-school Boy's Education; Girl-child Education in Nigeria; Each-One-Teach-One or Fund the Teaching of One; Literacy by Radio; and other notable programmes and schemes.

Out-of-School Boys' Education

The Out-of-School Boys' Education initiative, conceived by the National Commission for Adult and Non-Formal Education, addresses the issue of boys who have prematurely left formal education, now termed early school leavers or out-of-school boys. This programme aims to combat illiteracy among this demographic, recognizing the wide-ranging negative effects of dropout, including crime and economic setbacks (Iyanda, Olufayo, & Savage, 2018). The objectives of Out-of-Boys' Education, as outlined by the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2010), are as follows:

- (a) Increase access to and retention in Basic Education for Out-of-School Boys in the South-Eastern States.
- (b) Provide educational opportunities for approximately 50,000 out-of-school boys annually in the South-Eastern States by establishing up to 1,000 Non-Formal Education Centers.
- (c) Raise completion rates for boys in states with high dropout rates to at least 80%.
- (d) Reduce the gender gap nationally to less than 10%.

The introduction of Out-of-Boys' Education has spurred increased commitment from State Governors and Local Government Chairmen, evidenced by their provision of counterpart funding for UNICEF assistance. Evaluation reports, such as those by NMEC/UNICEF (2010) and Odiaka (2018), have noted positive outcomes, including higher enrollment, retention, and completion rates among beneficiaries. Consequently, there has been an expansion in the establishment of Non-Formal Education Centers for out-of-school boys nationwide.

Girl-child Education programme in Nigeria

Nigeria, as a signatory to international conventions on women's and children's rights, has embraced several key agreements, including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms

of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1981) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ratified by 192 countries in 1989. Additionally, the Ouagadougou Declaration in 1996 underscored the importance of the girl-child's right to education. Nigeria has ratified these conventions, along with commitments from the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in 2000, demonstrating its dedication to eliminating disparities in access to education, especially for girls (NPE, 2004).

This commitment has led to joint efforts by the Federal and State Governments, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Department for International Development (DFID), ActionAid, and various national non-governmental and civil society organizations to improve girl-child education in the 19 Northern States of Nigeria, where the situation is particularly dire. The objectives of girl-child education, as outlined by Rogers (1979), include:

- (a) Increasing girl-child enrollment, retention, and completion in basic education.
- (b) Providing child-friendly school environments with adequate infrastructure and sanitary facilities.
- (c) Training and deploying female teachers/instructors as role models for girls in rural areas.
- (d) Eliminating gender disparities in basic education, skills development, and training.
- (e) Economically empowering women to encourage their daughters' education.
- (f) Eradicating negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls.
- (g) Promoting and protecting the rights of the girl-child and raising awareness of her needs and potential.
- (h) Ending the economic exploitation of child labor and protecting young girls both at work and during schooling.
- (i) Strengthening the family's role in improving the status of the girl-child.

A national Gender Policy in Basic Education was developed to address cultural barriers hindering girls' access to education, followed by the creation of a curriculum specifically for the girl-child and adolescent education in 2005. Advocacy and sensitization efforts, particularly in low-enrollment states like Zamfara, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Katsina, were undertaken as part of the Girls Education Project (GEP). Instructional materials were provided to project states, and student tutoring, mentoring, and counseling services were prioritized by the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC).

A 2008 report from the Gender Department of the Federal Ministry of Education indicated a 30% increase in girl-child enrollment in 2007, suggesting progress in enrollment, retention, and completion rates in participating states. Model centers were established to support young girls who had left school due to early marriage or unwanted pregnancies, facilitating their reintegration into the formal education system in GEP states.

Each-One-Teach-One or Fund-the-Teaching-of-One (EOTO/FTO) was introduced in Nigeria in 1991 by the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) to combat illiteracy. The strategy aims to personalize literacy education, emphasizing its importance for national development while reducing the cost of provision. This policy, adopted by the federal government, ensures that illiterate citizens receive education and harnesses the creative potential of ordinary individuals. The programme raised

awareness about mobilization strategies, with the hope that effective implementation would significantly reduce illiteracy rates in Nigeria.

Literacy by Radio

Literacy by Radio is a method aimed at promoting reading, writing, and computing skills through radio broadcasts, facilitating Basic Education delivery to a wide audience across vast geographical areas. This strategy enables a single tutor to reach numerous learners simultaneously, allowing adult learners to study at home using their own radios.

The overarching objective of the Literacy by Radio project is to swiftly eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria by enhancing access to basic literacy for adult learners, regardless of age, gender, socio-cultural, or economic circumstances, thus fostering human development in Nigeria.

Since inception, the project has conducted baseline surveys, developed primers in various local languages, created production manuals and facilitators' guides, and trained facilitators and radio producers. The radio programme, initially in English, has been adapted and broadcasted nationwide. Evaluation is ongoing, with plans to expand to cover all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, although some areas are not yet operational.

The project has integrated literacy messages into health, nutrition, agriculture, vocational, and life skills within each primer lesson. Primers are available in 19 local languages, accompanied by production manuals and facilitator guides. Training for facilitators and radio producers has been completed, and radio programmes are currently broadcast in 30 states, indicating progress towards project objectives.

Challenges Hindering Educational Goals:

Several factors contribute to the challenges faced by the adult and non-formal education sector in Nigeria. These include:

- a. **Lack of Relevance:** Many existing programmes do not address the needs and interests of adult learners, leading to low motivation and engagement.
- b. **Quality Issues:** Inconsistent standards and insufficient training for educators result in varying quality across educational initiatives.
- c. **Accessibility Barriers:** Geographical disparities, socio-economic factors, and cultural norms contribute to unequal access to education, particularly among marginalized groups.
- d. **Funding Constraints:** Limited financial resources allocated to the sector hinder the expansion of programmes and the enhancement of infrastructure and resources

Importance of Curriculum Reform:

Curriculum reform is essential for revitalizing the adult and non-formal education sector in Nigeria. By redefining learning objectives, content, and instructional methods, curriculum reform can:

- a. **Enhance Relevance:** Aligning curriculum content with the needs and interests of adult learners ensures greater relevance and applicability, thereby increasing engagement and retention.
- b. **Improve Quality:** Implementing standardized curriculum frameworks and providing professional development opportunities for educators improve teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes.

c. **Promote Inclusivity:** Designing flexible and learner-centered curricula accommodates the diverse needs and backgrounds of adult learners, fostering inclusivity and equitable access to education.

d. **Optimize Resources:** Prioritizing curriculum reform enables efficient utilization of resources by focusing on high-impact educational interventions and innovative teaching approaches.

Strategies for Curriculum Reform:

To facilitate curriculum reform in the adult and non-formal education sector, the following strategies are recommended:

a. **Needs Assessment:** Conduct comprehensive needs assessments to identify the learning needs, interests, and priorities of adult learners across diverse communities and regions.

b. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Foster collaboration and consultation with stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, community leaders, and civil society organizations, to ensure the inclusivity and ownership of curriculum reform initiatives.

c. **Curriculum Development:** Design learner-centered and competency-based curricula that emphasize practical skills, lifelong learning competencies, and socio-cultural relevance, drawing upon best practices and contextualized approaches.

d. **Professional Development:** Provide training and capacity-building opportunities for educators to enhance their pedagogical skills, content knowledge, and sensitivity to the diverse needs of adult learners.

e. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness, relevance, and impact of curriculum reform efforts, facilitating continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making.

Challenges of Curriculum Reform in the Adult and Non-Formal Educational Sector in Nigeria

Some of the challenges of these vital reforms in adult and non-formal education in Nigeria are aptly discussed as follows:

(a) **Inadequate funding.** There is no gain saying the fact that the budgetary allocation to Adult and Non-Formal Education is grossly inadequate, especially when compared to formal educational sector. This factor has greatly affected the successful implementation of these laudable reforms in Nigeria.

(b) **Inadequate political will.** There is the need for increase in political will on the part of government for proper representation of adult and non-formal education in National Education Policy Documents. According to NMEC and UNICEF (2010), NMEC was neither represented in the National Steering Committee nor the Implementation Task Team in the Roadmap for the Nigerian Education Sector (2009). It therefore implies that little or nothing was written about Adult and Non-Formal Education in the Roadmap and if it is going to serve as a pointer to events in Education Sector, then Adult and non-formal Education is already sidelined.

(c) **Shortage of personnel:** There is shortage of professional practitioners who are not professionals in the field.

(d) Poor and irregular remuneration of facilitators. Most adult educators operate on voluntary basis has turned out to be problematic. In some cases, most States and Local Governments failed to pay regularly and the paltry sum being paid to the facilitators is owed for months. This situation no doubt is a threat to the success of the reforms of Adult and Non-Formal Education programmes as the facilitators are in the frontline in the implementation of the programmes.

(e) Poor attitudes of the target groups. Most target groups do not attach the seriousness needed to Adult and Non-Formal Education programmes making them failed to enroll and few of them who enrolled may withdraw at the slightest excuses. To NMEC and UNICEF (2010), an average of 1.7million learners out of over 44million projected learners had only embraced Adult Education programme.

Recommendations towards overcoming the challenges:

The major remedies to ensure successful implementation of the above named reforms in Adult and Non-Formal Education programme in Nigeria include:

- (1) Government at all levels should be more committed in implementation and funding of Adult and Non-Formal Education programme. Most especially, they should match actions with necessary legislation.
- (2) Adult and non-formal education should be given a strong political will by the government for the programme to be successfully implemented.
- (3) Both the electronics and print media should be used to reach to a large number of people on the relevance of Adult and non-formal education to the growth of individual and the society at large.
- (4) Value re-orientation and attitudinal change about Adult and Non-Formal Education programme should be encouraged among the citizenry, particularly among the target groups.
- (5) For the successful implementation of the reforms in Adult and Non-Formal Education programs in Nigeria, the federal government should collaborate with all stakeholders, including local and state governments, the organized private sector, parents, and communities, to ensure comprehensive support, effective resource allocation, and widespread participation in advancing adult and non-formal education initiatives across the country

Conclusion

Curriculum reform is imperative for advancing educational goals in the adult and non-formal education sector in Nigeria. By addressing the challenges of relevance, quality, accessibility, and funding, curriculum reform can transform educational programme for adults, empowering individuals, and communities to achieve their full potential. Through strategic planning, stakeholder collaboration, and innovative approaches, Nigeria can realize the vision of inclusive and equitable lifelong learning for all.

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