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# ADULT EDUCATION: A PANACEA FOR ACHIEVING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper focuses on adult education as a panacea for achieving inclusive education and lifelong learning in Nigeria. Adult education is education designed to equip individuals (physically abled and physically challenged) with the necessary capabilities, knowledge, sound attitude, skills and competencies required to function optimally and equally excel in all facets of life. This paper starts with an introduction as well as the conceptual discourses. It discusses the contributions of adult education in achieving inclusive education and lifelong learning. The way forward and conclusion were also made.*

**Keywords***:* Adult Education, Inclusive Education, Lifelong Learning

## Introduction

Adult education cuts across disciplines. It is universal and applies to everyone, irrespective of age and physical conditions. Adult education is an integral part of the right to education and lifelong learning, and comprises all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults (including those with special needs) 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 capacities for living and working, both in their interests and those of their communities, organizations and societies (UNESCO Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education, 2015).

Adult education is a very vital instrument of change. It is an essential right that should be accorded to all human beings. Nigeria aims at achieving quality education for all but some perceived that learning problems of students with special needs constitute a great task in making education for all possible. Special needs students have right to the benefits of a full school experience with needed modification and supports alongside their peers without special needs who receive general education. School builds the learner's confidence as he tackles one task after another.The notion behind inclusive education which isa process of enhancing the capacity of the education system in any country to reach out to diverse students is assisting students and teachers become better members of a community by creating new vision for communities and for schools while lifelong learning views learning as what takes place every day. It is the continuous building of competencies, capabilities and knowledge throughout the life of an individual, especially a physically challenged person.

The importance of adult education cannot be over emphasized. It is vital to everyone in the society because integration of special education is the most realistic form of education for both the physically abled and physically challenged. However, many

governments have not conducted enough research on the physically challenged. One of the major obstacles of integration of special education in Nigeria is the inadequate facilities and equipment, which constitute a barrier to the proper training and adjustment of disabled people, especially children. UNESCO (2019) defines inclusion in education as a process that helps overcome barriers that limit the presence, participation and achievement of learners. Inclusion as an integral part of lifelong learning reaffirms each individual's right to education as upheld in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is understood as a process concerned with; learning how to live with and from difference and placing a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement.

In Nigeria, certain efforts have been made to achieve inclusive education and lifelong learning. School communities have been mobilized to bring the most excluded children to school and improve their experience, and local government in some areas has coordinated resources to support their participation. Thus, this paper will be discussed under the following subheadings: Conceptual discourses and contributions of adult education in achieving inclusive education and lifelong learning in Nigeria.

## Conceptual Discourses

### Adult Education

Adult education has no specific definition. It differs from one scholar to another, culture to culture and society to society. Adult education is all organized and educational activities (whether informal, formal and non-formal education) designed for those (whether literates, illiterates and school dropouts, among others) who are considered adults in the society which they belong, to equip them with sound attitude, skills and knowledge to enable them live a better and productive life. According to Akintayo and Oghenekowho (2004:7), adult education is that fire which brings about a maximum readjustment of attitude within a society to any new and changed situation in the possible time and which helps to initiate changes which evolves and imparts new skills and techniques required and made necessary by the change. In a similar light,adult education is a process whereby individuals who no longer attend school on a regular and full time basis undertake a sequential and organized activities with the aim of having changes in understanding, attitudes and knowledge (California State University of Education, cited in Adekola ,2008)

Adult education is all organized and purposeful educational activities designed for adults for their personal and societal fulfillment within and out of school which enable them to adapt to constant changing global requirements and needs and to solve present and emerging problems which may include health, environment, economic, social and political problems, in order to get them integrated into the society and avoid exclusion and marginalization (Obidiegwu, 2013). Adult education is vital for updating literacy skills in all aspects of knowledge. In order words, adult education is a veritable vehicle for achieving Education for All (EFA) and continuing learning because it sees men and women as a learning society where individuals learn and equally teach others throughout life. Men and women are expected to share and interact throughout life in order to gain meaningful experiences for effective

participation, integration and communal living.

Adult education is an integral part of a global scheme for lifelong education and learning. Individual schools strive for lifelong learning through adult education programmes such as seminars, workshops and conferences, among others (UNESCO, cited in Obiozor & Obidiegwu, 2013:7). In a similar way, adult education is all the activities with an educational purpose that are carried on by people, engaged in the ordinary business of life (Bryson, cited in Obiozor & Obidiegwu, 2013). It involves a continuum of learning from informal, formal and non-formal education. It is also a process of preparing oneself or others for productive life in school and out of school. Adult education is a systematic process of acquiring and updating knowledge, skills and competencies for a profession, business or a vocation as a means of adapting and coping with daily changes in the society and environment.In this study, adult education is all organized and educational activities designed for individuals , including special needs students to enable them to study together and to equip them with the necessary knowledge, skills, values, sound attitude and competencies required to excel in life.

**Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is a process of removing barriers to the education of the special needs and enabling all students with all kinds of abilities and needs to get education within general school systems. It has become an international buzz word and has been adopted in the rhetoric of many countries across the world (Segal, 2005).Inclusion is a developmental approach that tries to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion (UNESCO, 2003). Regular education classes linked with special education services is a model when referred to as inclusion. Students with special needs are educated together with their peers for at least half of the day.

In a full time inclusion, specialized services are provided within a regular classroom by sending the services into work with one or more students in their regular classroom setting (Wisconsin Education Association Council, 2007). Inclusion is education of all students in regular classes. In fact, it means appropriate educational programmes for every student. Inclusion assumes that students with special needs can attend ordinary schools. Inclusive education means that schools should accommodate every student (all children) regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions (UNESCO, 2003).

In an inclusive education school, the special needs students are taught together with others but with certain considerations to their (special) educational needs. Inclusive education takes the disabled children as children with special needs that need special attention. It fails to see disabled children (students) as impaired.

Thus, inclusive education calls for a flexible education system that can accommodate the needs of wide range learners. It attempts to ensure that every student is allowed in the same educational setting and equally assumes that their special needs and learning styles are appreciated and encouraged. The concept of inclusive education has been broadened to encompass not only students with

disabilities, but all students who may be disadvantaged.

Furthermore, inclusive education is a form of education which says that all children can learn together in the same school no matter who they are. It entails reaching out to all learners and removing all barriers that could limit participation and achievement. Barriers to inclusive education include; social, institutional, physical, attitudinal and disability. Put differently, inclusive education is a process of addressing the diverse needs of all learners by reducing barriers to and within the learning environment. According to UNICEF cited in Singh (2016), inclusive education means attending the age appropriate class of the child's local school, with individually tailored support. It is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. Inclusive education is about ensuring access to quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive. In agreement with the above definitions, inclusive education is education that includes everyone, with special needs students and others learning together in mainstream schools, colleges and universities for lifelong learning.

**Lifelong Learning**

Lifelong learning builds on prior learning as it expands knowledge and skills in depth and breadth. According to Europa (2003), lifelong learning is all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, and social or employment related perspective. Lifelong learning views learning in its totality and covers formal, non-formal and informal patterns of education, and attempts to integrate and articulate all structures and stages of education along the temporal and spatial dimensions.

It is flexible in time, place, content and techniques of learning and calls for self-directed learning, sharing of one's enlightenment with others and adopting varied learning styles (Cross, cited in Obidiegwu & Obiozor, 2013:69). Lifelong learning involves different forms: continuing education, training, life skills development activities, for instance, the traditional school system from primary to tertiary level, free adult education, informal research and training, undertaken individually, in a group setting or within the framework of social movements.

In the words of Madhukar (2004), lifelong learning embraces learning in any type of setting ranging from formal education systems of all kinds, through diverse sorts of non-formal educational provision to the limitless situations and contexts in which informal learning can occur. Madhukar further pronounces that lifelong learning implies that learning opportunities are available outside the formal school system and that both employed and unemployed adults must learn in order to cope with rapidly changing demands of the workplace.

Most importantly, lifelong learning encompasses four core forms of learning such as informal, formal, non-formal and self-directed learning. These forms of learning were outlined by Livingstone (2001). Lifelong learning can be clearly explained using lifelong, life wide and life deed dimensions. Lifelong dimension stands for what an individual learner learns from cradle to grave (birth to death). Lifelong learning approach is learning

obtained from cradle to tomb. Life wide dimension stands for learning that does not confine only to the formal educational system. It is an approach/dimension that recognizes the fact that learning takes place in different environments and situations. It encompasses informal, formal and non-formal learning. Life deep dimension stands for values, beliefs, ideologies and orientations brought to life (Banks etal, 2007).

Thus, lifelong learning is the "lifelong, life wide and life deep" pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional reasons. Lifelong learning sees learning as what takes place every day (at home, at work, in families and personal lives, visiting relatives or relaxing through observation, discussions, dialogue and recreation). It views education (learning) in its totality (Cross, cited in Obiozor & Obidiegwu, 2013). Lifelong learning is not a generalized process but an individualized process where a learner engages oneself in acquiring and upgrading of skills, knowledge and competencies to remain relevant and productive in life. In this study, lifelong learning is the continuous building of skills, knowledge and competencies throughout the life of an individual.

**Contributions of adult education in achieving inclusive education and lifelong learning**

The contributions of adult education to inclusive education and lifelong learning cannot be overemphasized. Adult education contributes to inclusive education and lifelong learning through in-service training, vocational education and training and open distance learning, among others. In-service training refers to the professional development of teachers who are already in the classroom. Governments rely on in-service training to improve and update the skills of current teachers as well as to introduce and implement educational reform. In-service training is viewed as the relevant courses and activities in which a serving teacher may participate to upgrade his professional knowledge, skills and competence in the teaching profession. It encompasses all forms of training and education given to a teacher who is already on the job of teaching and learning. In the words of Ali (2014), teachers occupy an important position in the teaching and learning enterprise. Educators determine the nature and extent of learning achievement in schools. As important as they are in inclusive education and lifelong learning, they are the most critical actors.

Shade and Stewart (2001) observed that teachers reported frustration, burden, fear and inadequacies because they did not believe that they have the abilities to meet the individual needs of children with special needs in their classroom. This is because their professional skills were not developed before they entered the workforce of inclusive setting. Thus, adult education equips teachers already teaching with the requisite skills and techniques required for inclusive lifelong learning through in-service training programmes. It is expected that teachers in Nigeria should update their professional skills on a regular basis to enhance their teaching performance especially for inclusive classroom.

Most importantly, teachers through in-service training programmes (such as seminars and workshops) acquire inclusive principles and the basic disability to ensure that their attitudes and approaches do not prevent disabled children from gaining equal access to the curriculum. This is

because effective implementation of inclusive education and lifelong learning depends on the high quality of professional preparation of teachers at pre- and in-service levels to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills in meeting the needs and aspirations of learners in inclusive education and lifelong learning.

Vocational education and training is an aspect of adult education designed to teach people knowledge and specific practical skills to help them in the work place. It is delivered in a number of ways through schools, dual sector universities with vocational education and training courses, private registered training organizations and community colleges. Vocational education and training focuses on specific trades, and imparts the practical skills which allow individuals to engage in a specific occupational activity. Vocational education and training is not only important in providing employment opportunities to individuals but helps in enhancing the productivity of firms.

Vocational education and training equips young people with competencies and relevant experiences required for particular occupations. Vocational education and training (VET) has long played an important role in the provision of pathways to further learning or employment, as well as providing second chance learning opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. VET is seen as one way to facilitate inclusion, as it seeks to provide individuals with skills that are directly applicable to the workplace and to getting a job.

For people with disabilities to participate in the workforce and engage within their communities, they need to possess the skills and knowledge prevalent in a 21st century global economy. In order to obtain the skills vital to be competitive in today's workforce and be productive in life, individuals with disabilities attend vocational education and training programmes to be equipped with the employability skills, knowledge and competencies required to fit-in in any entity, earn a living and equally be useful to themselves and the society at large. The key problem/challenge is that many learners with disabilities experience barriers to participation that interfere with their educational pursuit. To gain employment in the workforce, adults with disabilities need to possess a significant amount of reading, writing, calculating and problem-solving skills. People with disabilities face particular barriers in regards to developing employability skills as well as finding, maintaining and advancing in their careers. These challenges include lower expectations from employers, misconceptions from society, and inaccessible programmes and services. In order to overcome these barriers or challenges to employment, people with disabilities participate in vocational education and training programmes that are equitable and promote development of all learners in a socially inclusive manner.

Adult education contributes to inclusive education and lifelong learning through open distance learning. Open distance learning is any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone geographically removed from the learner, with all or most of the communication between teachers and learners being conducted through electronic or print media because learners and teachers are separated by time and space. One of the primary aims of open distance learning is to offer students learning anytime, anywhere. Thus, all open distance

learning resources must be designed to afford students with disabilities maximum opportunity to access distance education resources anytime, anywhere without the need for outside assistance (e.g sign language interpreters, aides, among others).

Open distance learning resources must generally be designed to provide built -in accommodation and/or interface design/content layout, which is accessible to "industry standard" assistive computer technology in common use by persons with disabilities. Adoption of access solutions which include assigning assistants to work with an individual student to provide access to distance learning resources should only be considered as a last resort when all efforts to enhance the native accessibility of the course material have failed. Often distance learning courses, resources and materials must be designed and delivered in such a way that the level of communication and course taking experience is the same for students with or without disabilities.

Open distance learning as an aspect of adult education has experienced several paradigm shifts in the way it has been conducted for the past years. This is the mode of teaching and learning that gives opportunities and options for people coming from different angles to further their studies in a more flexible manner. Open distance learning has been an alternative to traditional, campus-based class as it provides a second chance with the aim of closing the educational gap for its learners. It is meant to address issues of inclusiveness by being open when offering educational opportunities to its learners. Open distance learning known as correspondence education during the time when it was mediated by mail is currently replaced by technology-mediated learning known as e-learning or online learning. The idea about open distance learning is to remove barriers to education and allow learners to study according to their time, pace and place.

In Nigeria, adult education centre is everywhere in the cities and towns, and it is the core institution of communal life in the area of further education and an important guarantor of a citizen-oriented educational infrastructure. The continuing education hub, adult education is currently a place of learning as well as a defining social and cultural meeting place for everyone. Adult education centres are open to everyone, it is open to people of all social strata and income groups, all backgrounds and cultures, for people with and without disabilities, specifically for acquisition of veritable skills, sound attitude, competencies and knowledge, among others, needed to help respective beneficiaries to excel and meet up their daily demands and challenges.

Adult education contributes to the individual as well as collective development of societies in many ways. Non-formal and informal adult learning play a significant role for social inclusion, active citizenship as well as personal development and well-being, even though they are often not fully recognized as legitimate forms of education. Adult education provides knowledge, competencies and skills such as language skills, creative skills, among others. These can be used for both professional and private advancement and in many cases, enable people to access the formal education system. It promotes transversal skills such as social skills, communication skills, analytical and cognitive skills, among others. They are sometimes called

life skills. All of these skills are vital for participating in the labour market and creating new jobs, engaging in democratic processes and becoming an active citizen. Taking part in adult education has very positive effects on the individual in terms of better health in the old age, better general well-being and inclusion in the community and society.

**The way forward**

The following will help to achieve inclusive education and lifelong learning:

1. School buildings for inclusive learning should be built bearing in mind the convenience and comfort of the special needs students.
2. Adequate human and material resources should be provided to take care of special needs students within and outside the school.
3. Awareness campaigns should be carried out to educate parents of the special needs students on the need to send them to school periodically.
4. Seminars and workshops should be used frequently to update the knowledge of the teachers of the special needs students.

**Conclusion**

Adult education is a veritable tool to reduce illiteracy from society because it allows individuals, including special needs students to develop their skills and acquire new ones. It is an important instrument for achieving inclusive education and lifelong learning. Inclusive education is a form of education designed to enable all children learn together in the same school no matter who they are. It entails reaching out to all learners and removing all barriers that could limit participation and achievement. Lifelong learning refers to the process of gaining knowledge and learning new skills throughout life.

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