



ADULT AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION FOR EFFECTIVE CITIZENSHIP: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This is a positional paper. The purpose was to examine adult and non-formal education for effective citizenship with major focus on challenges and prospects in Nigeria. In the study, adult education agenda for Nigeria entail the development and implementation of a systemic adult education policy. The policy guides both in conception and implementation by a philosophy of continuing education or lifelong learning. The characteristics of adult and non- formal education, as identified in the study include: Client centeredness, as against subject centeredness in formal education; Fulfillment of immediate and practical needs; Occurs outside school setting; Involve part time study; Designed for voluntary students; Local initiative, self-help and encourages innovation; Possibility of varying programmes to meet specific needs of different clients; Control and autonomy are at local level with little or no control from the top; Cost is less than in formal education; Flexible admission criteria. The challenges adult and non-formal education for effective citizenship in Nigeria were identified and discussed. Strategies for the promotion of adult and non- formal education for effective citizenship in Nigeria were also discussed. Suggestions for improvement include: that The adult and non-formal education programme should provide the rural populace with agricultural and citizenship education through the extension agents who will show the primary school leaver and illiterate populace new seeds and animals as well as new farming techniques and citizenship orientation to improve their agricultural production and responsible citizenship; that adult and non-formal education programmes should design curriculum for the training and retraining of school dropouts, unemployment adults, skilled and semi-skilled workers in current job as well as in job that are likely to exist beyond the 21st century and that the adult and non-formal education curriculum should be designed to develop the appropriate skill of adult students who would be better prepared to meet the challenge of the future. This means that adult learners should be taught the skills they need to anticipate and solve problems of the future.

Keywords: Adult; Non-Formal Education; Effective Citizenship; Challenges and Prospects

Introduction

Nigeria, along with other developing countries of the world, have over the years invested large amount of their resources to attain the millennium development goal of education for all (EFA) especially in the formal sector. Despite these loadable efforts, large populations of their citizen are still not opportune to have access to formal education (Enwezor, 2021; Okeke 2022; Okeke &



Okaforcha, 2025). A number of reasons account for this ugly trend. In northern part of Nigeria, Onyekwelu, (2024) noted that there are negative social/cultural repulse to education, which forbids certain group of people from acquiring formal education. A contemporary example is the Boko-haram which means “no formal school”. In other parts of the country, ignorance and poverty are part of the reasons why people are not able to access formal education (Iloka & Nwakoby, 2025; Okaforcha & Okeke, 2019). In parts of Igbo land, the quest for acquisition of material possession (wealth) debars people to have access to formal education (Ojimba, 2020). Those in this category needs no formal education. In view of this, it becomes imperative to develop strategies that will help to promote non- formal education to provide for skills and knowledge for those who have passed the age for full time enrollment in formal school (Okeke, Okaforcha & Ekwesianya, 2019). Developing strategies in this context means man’s ability to think and make conscious decisions about himself and his environment, reasoning out and charting a course for oneself, the country or group to follow (Nwagwu (2001 33). Okoye (2021) noted that this will involve the identification of the educational needs of the various segments and clusters, both as individuals and groups.

The Concept of Adult and Non-Formal Education

An adult education agenda for Nigeria would entail the development and implementation of a systemic adult education policy. The policy would be guided both in conception and implementation by a philosophy of continuing education or lifelong learning (Osegbue, 2019). Lifelong learning as a philosophy and a way of life emphasizes that learning should be ongoing throughout life (Anthony, 2019). A responsively comprehensive adult education policy should seek to institute and sustain a culture of learning that will lead to the emergence of a learning society (Onyekwelu & Adinna, 2022). Anushiem and Anushiem (2023) reiterated that as Nigerian adults grapple with the problems and opportunities in their personal lives, they are simultaneously challenged to contribute to the development of their communities and society. Hence, lifelong learning becomes imperative, not only for the effective functioning of individuals at the workplace and in their own communities, but also for the renewal of society itself (Enwezor & Chukwunonye, 2021; Ugwaka & Igbokwe, 2023). A systemic and comprehensive adult education policy would pursue, among others, the following key objectives. Provision of incentives for adult participation Adults are generally saddled with occupational and familial concerns.

In a country like Nigeria, where poverty is currently pervasive, people are preoccupied with how to eke out a living (Ekwesianya, 2022). Consequently, motivating adults to participate in education and training programs that are not employer-sponsored would require a variety of incentives, such as subsidised child care services especially in the cities, flexible scheduling, and career and personal guidance services (Okeke, Okaforcha & Ekwesianya, 2019).

In most developing countries, Ofozoba and Ofozoba, (2022) noted that adult education programs are not integrated to ensure a relationship among the programs, and to ensure that each program, at once, addresses the needs of adult participants, as well as the needs of society. Coherence



would also seek to ensure that the programs or services prospective participants need are available, and that ways in which participants can transition among programs are provided (Adinna & Onyekwelu, 2021). A coherent adult education policy would have a unifying mission, as well as organisational structural mechanisms for coordinating programs and activities (Okaforcha, 2021). Anushiem, (2023) and Azubuike (2024) opined that the policy would provide a clearly defined framework and guidelines for the participation of non-governmental organisations, the private sector and international organisations in adult education.

There is a tendency in developing countries to concentrate efforts in adult education on literacy or basic education (Ekwesianya, 2025). If the talents and abilities of the adult population are to be developed, mobilised and optimally utilised in national development, there must be comprehensive education and training opportunities for adults (Ezeaku & Okoye, 2025). Okoye and Ezeaku, (2025) noted that a variety of professional, vocational and general education programs and courses must be available and affordable. Listed and briefly discussed below are examples of broad themes or topics around which programs could be developed and offered not just in cities, but also in rural communities.

According to Okpetu (1999) the characteristics of adult and non- formal education are:

- i. Client centeredness, as against subject centeredness in formal education.
- ii. Fulfillment of immediate and practical needs.
- iii. Occurs outside school setting.
- iv. Involve part time study
- v. Designed for voluntary students
- vi. Local initiative, self-help and encourages innovation
- vii. Possibility of varying programmes to meet specific needs of different clients.
- viii. Control and autonomy are at local level with little or no control from the top.
- ix. Cost is less than in formal education.
- x. Flexible admission criteria.

The advocates of non-formal education (Okechukwu, 2025; Osegbue, 2021) insist on its continuity based on the following reasons

1. Non- formal education services as a means of reducing increasing gap of rural – urban socio-economics problems.
2. Non- formal education, through its diversified programme has been viewed as an effective means of poverty alleviation (Okandeji 2005)
3. Non –formal education equips participants to become more functional and responsible citizens of the nation.
4. Non-formal education develops personal, social and professional skills through experimenting in a relatively safe environment.
5. Non-formal education develops in the recipients such life sustaining qualities as self-confidence, respect, tolerance, intellectual awareness and independence, creativity empowerment, emancipation etc. (Okandeji 2005)



6. Non-formal education focuses on teaching people to improve their basic level of subsistence, nutritional standard and general health practices

National Policy on Education its Provision for Adult and Non-Formal Education

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) outlined the goals of mass literacy, adult and non-formal education to include:

- Provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education. These include the nomads, migrant families, the disabled and other categories or groups, especially the disadvantaged gender (Ezeamama & Ofozoba, 2023; Ibe, 2022).
- Provide functional and remedial education for those youths who did not complete secondary education.
- Provide education for different categories of completers of the formal education in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills.
- Provide in-service on the job, vocational and professionals in order to improve their skills

Give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment. Equally, Adekola and Ezekiel (2013), writing on nomadic education posited that the aims include the following:

- To take education to the door steps of children of nomads and migrant fishermen who have been denied their right to education because of their geographical location.
- The programme is aimed at enabling the nomads to acquire functional literacy for general information, enlightenment as well as basic numeracy for accounting and improved management of their stock.
- The purpose of bringing education to all classes of people. Furthermore, the international encyclopedia of Education (2005), identified four major goals of non-formal education which include the following: i. Alternative Route to Upward Mobility. The emphasis on academic competence in the formal system means that only learners who are able to achieve the required level of competence are the only few that will eventually gain upward mobility at the expense of low achievers. Non-formal education afford alternatives routes to cope with the required level of competence in the social education.

Challenges of Adult and Non-Formal Education for Effective Citizenship in Nigeria

Despite the reasons advanced by the advocates of non-formal education, there are still hindrances to the effective promotion of the practice according to Ezeaku (2025).



1: Lack of literacy teachers. For there to be continuity in any profession or practice, there must be need for those who will pass across the demanded knowledge or skill for others. The lack of these caliber of persons will hinder the promotion or continuity of the practice. In the case of non-formal education, the lack of literacy teachers or instructors is a serious hindrance to the promotion of the discipline in Nigeria (Azubuike, 2025; Onyekwelu, 2021). The reason for this may not be unconnected to the low salary and low status of instructors, resulting to lack of motivation noticed among the instructors of non-formal education sector (Okechukwu, 2025). The instructors are poorly paid, their position in the educational sectors in some parts of Nigeria is not recognized. The resultant effect is that those who feel they cannot contain drift to some other sectors.

2: Inadequate funding: Inadequate funds to run non-formal education programmes in Nigeria seem to be one of the most pressing hindrance to the promotion of the sector. Onyekwelu, (2024) and Osegbue, and Nnubia, (2020) posited that no matter how laudable an educational plan and objectives may appear, if there are no funds to carry out the programmes and project which will lead to achievement of the set objectives and plans, it will not see the light of the day. In Nigeria, the government seem to pay more attention to formal education and less to non-formal education sector, even when the immediate and practical solutions to most of the nation's problems could be addressed through the sector (Enwezor & Obi, 2022). The problem of funding the non formal sector is further compounded by the fact that non-formal sector is not easily assessed in terms of the quality of activities carried out in sector, unlike the formal education sector which can be quantifiable (Ucheagwu-Okoye, 2025). Hence insufficient financial allocation is a major hindrance to promotion of non-formal education in Nigeria.

3: Lack of recognition of non-formal education sector in Nigeria: There is little or no recognition given to graduates or practitioners in the non-formal education sector. Izuchukwu, Ugwaka, Arazu and Ezechi (2023) noted that the over emphasis on certificate as against practical work and skill had made the value of non-formal education not to be realized. It is a known fact that most developed countries of the world (Japan) did not only depend on the formal educational system but used a merger of the formal and non-formal educational sectors (Abonyi, 2021). Since it is difficult to assess the non formal sector in Nigeria, recognizing and placing the products of the non-formal education becomes more difficult and a very major hindrance to the promotion of the sector.

4: Lack of trained or qualified practitioners: there is shortage of teachers or instructors in the non-formal sector, added to this is the fact that the few available are not trained or professionals. Since there is shortage, Ekwesianya, Okaforcha and Okeke (2020) noted that any person who shows some level of competence is taking to be a practitioner, even when such persons do not possess the required training. This is another hindrance to the non-formal education sector in Nigeria. In most cases, people who had no form of training in the methodology, principles and techniques of teaching adults are allowed into the sector (Obumse & Egenti, 2021).

5: Problem of underrating the sector: the non-formal education sector in Nigeria is under rated and undervalued compared to formal education sector. These perception makes the society to see the recipients of the non-formal education as second class citizen or people who are not educated (Ucheagwu-Okoye, 2025). Most times, the recipients of the non-formal education are even forced



to feel inferior before their formal education. This is a major challenge in the promotion of the sector as many who would have loved to be in the sector decline due to the let down (Enwezor, 2021).

Strategies for the promotion of adult and non- formal education for effective citizenship in Nigeria

The following strategies are suggested by Nwakoby (2025) for the promotion of non-formal education sector in Nigeria

Strategy 1: Numeration of Non-formal education client:

Government at all levels should make effort to collect the statistics of non-formal education clients through census. This will enable them to know how to plan for non-formal education.

Strategy 2: Identification of non-formal education needs in Nigeria: Through the available information on the concentration or location, level and needs of the clients, appropriate programme could be mounted.

Strategy 3: Grass root information about non-formal education programmes: Awareness campaign should not be in the urban centers only. Rural awareness campaign should begin from the families, then the villages and communities to give opportunity to rural dwellers.

Strategy 4: Government, private, and public, partnership.(G.P.P.P) on non-formal education programmes : Government should allow private partnership and the use of public building for non-formal education activities as against their ban in some states (e.g) River state.

Strategy 5: Tax rebates and grants: Reduction of taxes and allocation of grants to non-formal education operators, be it individuals or non-governmental organizations will go a long way to promote the sector.

Strategy 6: Regognition of non-formal education certificates: there should be certification of non-formal education activities and programmes as is done in the formal education.

Adult and Non- Formal Education in Nigeria: Framework for Effective Citizenship

As we have seen above, adult education is very broad that it requires all hands to be on deck for effective execution in all its ramifications (Ojimba, 2024). The formal education, which is enlist, is for specific period of life. But adult education focuses on the whole lifespan and is non-discriminatory. Therefore, it is very necessary to view adult education from different facets and perspectives. Some perspectives to be presented may not be new but there is need for them to be presented anew because of their significance in the twenty-first century (Enwezor, 2021; Okeke 2022; Okeke & Okaforcha, 2025). The Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) in 1973 presented a proposal for inclusion in the Third National Development Plan. This framework for the 21st millennium is adapted from the NNCAE former proposal. Functional Literacy We talk of functional variant of literacy because of the need to relate the content to the cultural, social and economic needs and interests of adults, and in order to motivate the adults. The previous campaigns against illiteracy did not yield the desired result of obliterating illiteracy in the country.



The adult literacy component of the recently launched UBE should constitute a new vision to launch a fresh offensive for the 21st century. However, and Iloka (2025) and Enwezor and Obi (2022) noted that the new conception for adult literacy should not be limited to initial skill of reading and writing. It should include post-literacy programmes so that the neo-literates will not relapse. Therefore, primers and follow-up reading materials should be provided. This necessitates establishment of public libraries and local newspapers to sustain the literacy skills. For effective functional literacy, the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education; the Stage Agencies for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education; and, Nomadic Education Commission should assume leading roles (Nwabachili, Iloka and Ucheagwu-Okoye, 2022). Other relevant ministries, which include Agriculture, Health, Social Development and Culture, Community Development, Women Affairs and Industries, should enlist their cooperation. Police Affairs, the Prison and the Military, the National Directorate of Employment and nongovernmental voluntary agencies, should enlist their support (Abonyi, 2020). The National Youth Services Corps, according to Okaforcha and Okeke (2020) should be made to include literacy campaign as an aspect of the Community Development assignment, while the orientation programmes should include methodology of adult education.

The religious bodies in the past played a very conspicuous role in adult literacy and some are still playing this noble role. They should be encouraged to double their efforts with moral and financial support from the government (Nwankwo & Ezeibe, 2021). The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) is required to play much role in literacy education in the country. Also, local government and communities should take charge in their areas. Continuing Education The need for learning throughout life underlies the concept of continuing education (Abonyi, 2022). This concept refers to programmes of education following cessation of formal education at a level after primary education. The programme could be in the area of intellectual, vocational or liberal education. In the educational continuum, it is ideal that when a person drops out of the formal system, the one should have opportunity to drop into appropriate level of the non-formal to continue his/her education (Ethelmary, Nwankwo & Aroh, 2019). Continuing education programmes are couched in different terms, such as, evening classes, extra-mural (for tertiary institutions) and extension classes. As a matter of fact, tertiary institutions extend their services to the public outside their walls through extra-mural classes. This could be done through different methodologies, which include, face-to-face, and print and electronic media (Ezeaku 2019). It is worthy of note that the aborted National Open University has now reopened to render it services to different categories of Nigerians. Obumse (2022) posited that tertiary institutions should double up their efforts towards continuing education. Professional Associations, Trade Unions and the Industrial Training Fund, should work harder to make much more impact. Furthermore, the tertiary institutions should accommodate examination-oriented and liberal programmes so as to take care of all interests (Osegbue, 2022). The important roles played by private efforts should be acknowledged and encouraged. Extension Education Here, one is thinking of tertiary institutions or ministries extending their research findings to the public. For instance, a lot of researchers are done in the Faculties of Agriculture and in the Agricultural



Research Institutes.

The findings, such as, improved varieties of crops, new cultivation techniques and improved animal species are sent to the farmers (Okaforcha & Iloka, 2025). Hence the relevance of extension departments. Also, in Health, the extension sections reach out and meet the needs of the public in the communities. Such services could come up in terms of inoculation, public lectures, campaigns against some diseases, such as AIDS, cholera and ringworm (Okaforcha & Iloka, 2025). Relevant ministries, institutions and agencies are very much called upon to take care of the extension education relating to their fields. Professional associations, such as Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Nigerian Pharmaceutical Association (NPA) and relevant agencies are called upon for services in this area.

Women Education As a result of the unique position of women in the society, special education programmes are designed for them in order to enable them discharge their functions creditably as mothers and wives, in technical, professional and in commercial areas (Ethelmary, Nwankwo & Aroh, 2019). The programmes, such as, Better Life For Rural Women, Family Support Programme, Family Economic Advancement Programme and, Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) should not be seen as belonging to a particular regime. Rather, the Women Affairs Ministry should use such to fashion out enduring programmes of education that could accommodate the interests of women in the country. Other agencies such as Health, Agriculture, Trade and Industry and Religious and non-governmental agencies should embrace women education programmes. In these days of gender sensitivities in the country, studies should be carried out on women education programmes and interests by relevant organizations (Okaforcha and Okeke, 2020). Family Education Educated families make a healthy nation. Therefore, there is great need to incorporate family education into adult education so as to enable husbands and wives and relations get new knowledge in family management. Nwankwo (2022) noted that the components of family education should include, planning, budgeting, family responsibilities, family planning and rationalization of production of children, children and adolescence psychology.

The Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Women Affairs, Social Development and Community Development, Tertiary Institution, the Nigerian Union of Teachers, Nigerian Medical Association, Voluntary Agencies and Religious bodies have much responsibility towards success in this area (Abonyi, 2020). Business/Commercial/Technical/Industrial Education Traditionally, vocational education is done mainly through apprenticeship system. That is, the system whereby a learner (apprentice) is attached to a master-craftsman for the purpose of undergoing training for acquisition of skills. Enwezor and Obi (2022) opined that opportunities for acquisition of new skills and improvement on working skills should be afforded to people in business, commerce and industries. The Ministries of Education, Industry, Trades, Science and Technology and Labour, Tertiary Institutions; Establishments, such as, Industrial Training Fund; Trade Unions, Vocational Improvement Centres, Professional Associations and other relevant



agencies should be expected to prove their mettle in this programme. Forces and Prison Staff Education (Enwezor, 2021; Ojimba, 2024)

The Armed Forces (the army and the police) and the prison staff constitute a special workforce. Apart from their specialized education/training for their specialized services, they need education for integrating them into the society (Obumse & Egenti, 2021). Even within their specialized fields, they still need more and continuous education to cope with their duties, hence there is army education corps. The Police and the Prison staff also need special education programmes to keep abreast of modern development and orientations (Ucheagwu-Okoye, 2025).

The Ministries of Defence, Internal Affairs and Education should join hands in the education of the service groups. The Army Education Corps, Police Service Commission and Prison Service counterparts should offer continuing education programmes for the personnel more so as the nature of their work may not allow them benefit from those outside their barracks. Prisoners' Education Prisoners are incarcerated as a corrective measure; therefore, there is need for different programmes of education for achievement of this objective (Ezeamama & Ofozoba, 2023; Ibe, 2022; Okechukwu, 2025). Already different correctional education programmes are being offered in the Nigerian prisons, such as, literacy, continuing and vocational. Also, citizenship, moral and liberal programmes are necessary for conscientizing the inmates towards responsible citizenship (Azubuike, 2025; Onyekwelu, 2021). Ezeaku (2025), Onyekwelu (2024) and Osegbue and Nnubia, (2020) argued that the National Commission, the State Agencies, the NNCAE and other education associations, Prison services and associations, religious bodies, voluntary agencies and other relevant bodies should co-operate in providing education services to prison inmates.

Conclusion

There is an increasing awareness in the nation, that formal education sector alone cannot equip the citizen with all the knowledge, skills and competence needed for a balanced national development. There is the need to explore the potentials of the non-formal sector. This paper concludes that since the non-formal sector is a veritable wheel for the development of individuals and nations at large, all stake holders, government and non-governmental agencies should encourage the full realization and utilization of the non-formal education sector, for national development.

Suggestions for Improvement

1. The adult and non-formal education programme should provide the rural populace with agricultural and citizenship education through the extension agents who will show the primary school leaver and illiterate populace new seeds and animals as well as new farming techniques and citizenship orientation to improve their agricultural production and responsible citizenship.



2. Adult and non-formal education programmes should design curriculum for the training and retraining of school dropouts, unemployment adults, skilled and semi-skilled workers in current job as well as in job that are likely to exist beyond the 21st century.
3. The adult and non-formal education curriculum should be designed to develop the appropriate skill of adult students who would be better prepared to meet the challenge of the future. This means that adult learners should be taught the skills they need to anticipate and solve problems of the future.

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