SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND ADULT EDUCATION

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Abstract

Adult and non-formal education programmes have been put in place to address the educational, social, economic and political needs of the people who are deprived opportunities, privileges in our society i.e. women, Almajiris, nomad, special need person, village dwellers, illiterates, etc. The paper pointed out that social inequality is the existence of socially created inequality, that is the condition of unequal opportunities, privileges and reward within our society. The paper shows the various forms of social inequality: unequal access to education, discrimination, unequal distribution of resources. It also stated social inequality can lead to social problem such as unemployment, poverty, theft, prostitution, drug abuse to mentioned but a few. Education is the powerful tool for reducing social inequality, with regard to that, Nigerian Government came up with different educational programmes through its various education and policies programmes to address the issues of inequality such as Education for All, Girls Education Initiative, Nomadic Education Programme and Special Needs Education Policy. The paper went further to discuss adult and non-formal education programmes which were designed to ameliorate the issues of social inequality which include Adult Basic Literacy, Adult Vocational Education, Critical Literacy. The paper recommends that government should put in place adequate monitoring mechanism for full implementation of it initiatives and Adult and non-formal education programmes and policy. Private individuals and organizations should be encouraged to establish more adult learning centres in their various communities.

Keywords: Social Inequality, Educational Inequality, Disadvantaged group, Social problem, Adult Education.

Introduction

Illiteracy, unemployment, theft, prostitution, etc have become some of the problems associated with the people that are deprived and marginalized. The existence of unequal opportunities, privileges and rewards within society make many people to find themselves into aforementioned problems. These people who are marginalized, deprived (the disadvantaged group) i.e. women, village dwellers, the poor, people with special needs, the nomad, etc have enormous potentials, that if develop optimally and empowered sustainably will contribute great to our nation at large.

The National policy on education identified 12 sections which constitute the philosophy of Nigerian education. These sections include: Pre-primary Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education, technical Education, Adult and Nonformal Education, Higher

Education, Special Education, Teachers' Education Services, Administration and Planning of Education and Financing of Education (NPE, 2016). The policy aim is to ensure that every Nigerian will be allowed to encouraged to develop into sound and effective member of society and create equal opportunities for all (Nigerians) irrespective of their physical status, social status, economic status, etc. This shows that, there is the inclusion of every Nigerian whether women, children, poor, special need person, illiterate, etc in the policy. Generally, education promote individual freedom, empowers and yields important development benefit (Anabe, 2020).

Education is a right for all irrespective of one's social status in many nations including Nigeria, because it gives access to other basic human rights such as heath, employment, housing and participation among others. Education brings about economic well-being, enhances health, encourages self-reliance and entrepreneurship and help people build better live and lift themselves and their children out of poverty, unemployment, ignorance, etc. adult and non-formal education according to Thomas (2019) is primarily concern with enhancing competence of adult people in society so that they can develop and adapt to our changing world.

Tozser in Katete (2023) recognizes Adult Education as a powerful catalyst for personal empowerment and societal progress that has spared the growth of diverse learning path ways, from vocational training to personal enrichment course. Distance learning programmes have democratised access to education, allowing learners to tailor their journey to align with their specific goals (Ramble, 2022).

Adult education in particular is the mean of shaping and improving the mind of the marginalised people in a purposeful manner. This paper investigate problems associated with social inequality in Nigeria and explores the educational opportunities initiated by government and it agency and proposes recommendation for effective implementation.

The Concept of Adult and Non Formal Education

Adult and non-formal education is a form of education which addresses man's educational social, economic and political needs, and how to meet these needs in society. It involves programmes essentially for the underprivileged and socially marginalized in society (Hassan, 2002). In the opinion of Olufunke (2013), Adult and non-formal education is a tool which free people from poverty ridden situations. It is a tool through which individuals and nations rise above their challenges. This implies that adult and non-formal education is considered as intervention to bound capacity and empower the poor, women, special need persons, dropout, etc, Mbalisi (2010). Adult and non-formal education is any educative and purposeful learning activity organized for disadvantaged adult to initiate them into new way of life by providing them with relevant skills, competencies, knowledge, information and attitude required to excel in that aspect of life.

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (cited in Jegede, 2005).

The entire body of organised educational process, whatever the content level or method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools or colleges and universities as well as apprenticeship whereby persons regarded as adult

by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them into a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in the two fold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced, independent, social, economic and cultural development.

Goals and Purpose of Adult and Non Formal Education
The Federal Republic of Nigeria draws inspiration from the philosophy and aims of adult and non-formal education, and state it objects as follows:

6. To provide functional literacy and continuing education for adult and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education.
7. To provide functional and remedial education for those young people who did not complete secondary education.
8. To provide education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills.
9. To provide in-service, on the job, vocational and professional trainings for different categories of workers and professional in order to improve their skills and
10. To give adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment (Nnamani, 2014).

These objectives are meant to equip the adult persons especially the disadvantaged group with everything needed to improve life in order to be relevant to the society by helping to solve personal and societal problems. Monye (1981) cited in Abubakar (2021) opined that all these objectives have one end in view to equip the adults (disadvantaged groups) with everything they need for life in order to be relevant to their society by helping to solve some of its problems.

The word disadvantaged group is a generic term for individuals or group of people who face special problems such as physical or mental disability, lack of money or economic support, are politically deemed to be without sufficient power or other mean of influence. In terms of education, disadvantaged group refers to those whom have right to education but with regard to the special problem faced, they become vulnerable (at risk) to the service. (Kardo, 2015).

This shows that, disadvantaged groups are people who lack access to education or who drop out due to social problems or economic reason or geographical location. These include: women, destitute, special needs person, school drop out to mention but a few.

The Concept of Social Inequality
Social inequality may refer to the existence of socially created inequality. It is a condition of unequal opportunities, privileges and rewards within a society. It occurs when certain groups or individual have more access to resource, power and social status. According to Schaefer (2011), social inequality can be described as a situation where different people have different wealth, prestige or power. It also refers to unequal or inequitable distribution

or allocation of tangible and intangible scarce resource in society. This implies that society's scarce resource is not for everybody.

However, to Therborn cited in Carmo (2021) social inequality is the differences that consider unjust among people in our society. It is a situation where individuals or group(s) are not treated fairly or have unequal access to resource, opportunities or rights. It involves a disparity or imbalance in the distribution of advantages, privilege or benefits leading to an uneven playing field. Scotland Marsha (2005:329). List such resources to include income, wealth, land, capital, other mean of incomes generating activities, healthcare, justice political participation, influence or prestige, freedom of though and action, employment, food, housing, education, leisure, etc.

Manifestation of Social Inequality
Social inequality can be manifested in various forms in Nigeria, these include:
    a.   Unequal distribution of resources e.g. income, wealth, education.
    b.   Discrimination e.g. based on level of education, sex, religion, tribe, age
    c.   Unequal access to opportunities e.g. employment, healthcare, housing, leisure.
    d.   Disproportionate representative e.g. in politics, media, leadership, positions.
    e.   Institutional biases, e.g. in laws, policies, practice.

Ways of measuring inequalities
    f.   Quantitative metrics e.g. income ratio, educational attainment
    g.   Quantitative Assessment e.g Perceived fairness, social cohesion
    h.   Comparative analysis e.g across different groups, religious

Effect of Social Inequality in Nigeria
According to Cooper (2014), Educational Inequality makes many people to be unemployed. Moreover, unemployment is among the biggest threat to social stability in many countries (including Nigeria). International Labour Organization (ILO), (2012). According to Nwagboso cited in Osemwinyen (2020), there are several effects of unemployment on the individual, household, and the community. Among which are: widespread poverty, self destructive behaviour (excessive alcoholism, drug abuse, etc). dysfunction, social and emotional relationships, criminality, hooliganism, armed robbery, assassinations, prostitutions, communal crisis, youth restiveness, kidnapping, vandalism and general insecurity such as the Niger Delta Uprising and Boko Haram issues.

In the same vein social inequality leads to the following problems:
1. Poverty and economic instability
2. Social unrest and conflict
3. Political instability and corruption
4. Limited access to educational and healthcare
5. Human right violation
6. Marginalisation and exclusion
7. Limited economic growth and development

8. Increased vulnerability to climate change and environmental degradation
9. Decreased social cohesion and community trust.
10. Perpetuation of circles of inequality and poverty (Cooper, 2014)

However, this paper restricts its discussion on adult and non formal education as a way of promoting social equity.

Need to Reduce Social Inequality

To ameliorate the aforementioned problems, Social inequality, according to Victor and Wilding (1990) must be reduced, eliminated, or kept under tight control through collective regulation. Likewise scholars like Holm, Lundhal, Weis and Schweis Furth, cited in Cooper (2014) have stressed the significance of education in promoting social equality. By this, education helps to break down stereotype ideas, reduce prejudice, injustice, deprivation and oppression.

This goes with the opinion of Oghenekohwo (2020) who said to:

> *"Address and redress these inequalities benchmarks require that people must engage in Adult learning activities, applicable knowledge and acceptable value, that would bridge widespread disparities in income, employment, healthcare and life expectancy among people of diverse interests and needs. Such learning activities are contextualised as self-directed, problem solving, interest based, participant inclined and adaptable environment."*

Adult education provides people who are marginalised with opportunities to continue their education at any level irrespective of their previous levels of education in order to improve their lives, income, ensure job security and participate meaningfully in their social, economic, political and cultural activities (Ghenro Oni and Apena 2018). This means that adult and non formal education create an avenue for all adults to learn and improve their wellbeing and widen their mental horizon.

Nigerian, government have made several efforts in order to reduce social inequality through educational initiative programmes.

The following are some of the initiatives for reducing the social inequality:

1. National Policy on Education (2016); Emphasized inclusive education and access for all.
2. Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act (2004): Aims to provide free and compulsory basic education.
3. Education for all Initiatives: Focuses on increasing access and quality education.
4. Girl-Child Education Initiative: targets reducing gender disparities in education.
5. Nomadic Education Programme: Establishes schools for nomadic children.
6. Special needs education policy: Supports inclusive education for children with disabilities.
7. Almajiri Education Programme: Targets out of school children in Northern Nigeria.
8. Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Programme Supports poor households to send children to school
9. Social Feeding Programme: Encourages enrolment and attendance.

1. Increased Funding: Allocation of more funds to education sector in recent budgets.
2. Teacher training and recruitment: Effort to improve teacher quality and quantity.
3. Curriculum reform: Inclusion of social studies and Civic Education to promote social cohesion.
4. Education Sector Plans: Development of Plans to address specific challenges in education.
5. Partnerships with NGOs and International Organizations: Collaboration to support education initiatives.
6. Establishment of agencies: National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCCE), National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non formal Education (NMEC), etc.

Adult Education Programmes for Ameliorating Social Inequality

Adult education is not only for eradication of illiteracy and ignorance, it is also a patent instrument for solving problem of injustice, deprivation and oppression which in turn bring peace, justice and equity among citizens.

Also, Eheazu cited in Ayimoro (2017) assert that*: "The strongest and desirable role of Adult education can and does play in redressing injustice, deprivations and repression suffered by victims of pseudo-egalitarianism and insincerity of purpose in the provision made for the general good in education, training and functional learning."*

There are various Adult education programmes that cater for the educational needs of the marginalised. According to Ojo (2010:7). There are various adult education programmes that help in ameliorating the problem of inequality in education. These includes Adult basic literacy/education, liberal education, civic education, vocational education, health education, distance learning, extension education, critical literacy, etc. for the purpose of this paper, the following are discussed.

*   Adult Vocational Education: Adult Vocational Education is a practical oriented programme. It is a process of developing the adult individuals for social, economic and occupational competence (Festus, 2015). Vocational Adult education provide the disadvantaged i.e women, illiterates, etc with different vocational skills such as carpentry, soap making, weaving, handset repair, that is to say, it prepares them for job/employment. Vocational Adult Education can help to reduce income inequality among the disadvantaged group by providing them with means to support themselves and their families.
*   Civic Adult Education: Is a programme of education designed to enlighten individuals in society to understand and realise the need to discharge one's civic obligations such as participation in voting. Anyawu (1987) sees Civic Adult Education as fundamental adult education concern with teaching the fundamental techniques of life arising as a result of rapidity in social changes and the consequence necessity for adaptation of change. According to him, it deals with the problems of social or community development, and is concerned also with the introduction of new ideas, skills and techniques, new ways of thinking and new methods of organisation. Through Civic

Adult Education, the disadvantaged group may be acquitted with knowledge of authority.

- Critical Literacy is what Paulo Freire referred to as education for Critical Consciousness. The purpose is to empower individual to think critically, and help themselves. It enable individual to become critical of what they see, hear, get and what they asked to give. Also it aim is to liberate people's mind concerning their lives in society. Disadvantaged group i.e. illiterate, the women, the disabled, etc need critical literacy to empower them to think critically, reflect on their experiences and take action for social change.

- Distance Education is a form of adult education programme provided for adults i.e. dropout who have need to complete their education or professional skills development. It involved the use of contact hour and information communications technologies (Computer, e-learning, e-mail, etc), in modern guides from facilitators to aid their leaning. Its more of self-study or self directed learning.

- Health Education is another form of education given to Adults on health education emphasis is laid on how to live and maintain a hygienic life. To keep one's self and surrounding clean to reduce the risk of diseases so as to ensure a health life (Hanachor and Otun, 2014). The disadvantaged groups need skills, knowledge, inclinations and chances of success in changing their behaviours so that they can be compatible with the demands of good health (Ekpu, 2007).

Conclusion

It is noted that in order to achieve any meaningful result in reducing social inequality among the disadvantaged group responsive adult and non formal education programmes such as adult basic literacy, adult vocational education, civic adult education, critical literacy to mention but few, can be utilised to make them literate, expose them to vocational skills/entrepreneur skills, raise their consciousness to become aware of their circumstance, and build in them capacity to discharge their duty as responsible citizen.

Recommendation

This paper makes the following recommendations.

1. Trained adult educators and facilitators should be employed to all adult learning centres.
2. Government should put in place adequate monitoring mechanism for full implementation of adult and non-formal education programmes and policies.
3. Private individuals and organization should be encouraged to establish more adult learning centres in their locality.
4. There should be a better funding for agency for mass education so that the adult educators and facilitators can discharge their duty effectively.

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