

Achieving Equitable and Qualitative Education through Non-Formal Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of non-formal education on achieving equitable and qualitative education which promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. The paper argues that non-formal education can provide higher-quality education, even more than what is obtained in formal schools today. Non-formal education can be preparatory, supplementary or an excellent alternative to formal schooling for all learners. The paper uses Deschooling the society theory to explain how formal education system fails to address educational challenges of equity and quality and therefore welcomes its reinforcement by non-formal educational practices. Lastly, it suggests, among other things, recognition of non-formal education as a dependable partner in the quest for quality education and making it accessible to all so that Nigeria can achieve the goal of equity in education.

Introduction

Education is central to the development of any nation because it is used as an important means of preparing citizens to live harmoniously and adapt themselves to the changes around them. It is in the light of this that nations design their educational programmes in such a manner that they help to

take care of the goals and aspirations of such societies. It is evident that since 1999, the Federal Government of Nigeria has expended huge amount of resources in the provision of basic education, especially at the levels of primary and junior secondary education (National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education, 2017). However, focus has been exclusively on formal schooling thereby snubbing over 65 million youth and adults who have lost out on the formal system, and who still have a right to all the opportunities that literacy can offer for them, such as healthy lifestyle, socio-economic opportunities, as well as political participation is tantamount to injustice (NMEC, 2017).

In spite of the huge expenditure on education, the World Declaration on Education for All has noted with dismay that generally, the condition of education (formal) in third world countries, Nigeria inclusive is poor in quality and, as such, this state of education needed to be improved upon and recommended that education be made both universally available and more relevant (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005).

This poor situation of education calls for a rethink over its state of delivery in Nigeria, it calls for a consideration of non-formal education and accord it attention it deserves so as to play a complimentary role or even serve as an alternative to formal education in the quest for equity and quality of education in Nigeria. Non-formal education is an intentional and systematic enterprise (usually outside the traditional schooling) in which content, media, time, units, admission criteria, staff, facilities and other system components are selected and or adopted for particular students, populations or situations in order to maximize, maintain and take care of any constraint of the system (Kleis, 1974). It occurs outside the traditional formal school system (Khasnabis et al, 2010). It should be noted, at this juncture, that the process of non-formal education is tailored to suit the needs of the participants in a way that is convenient and practical. It also takes care of any inequality and discrimination in the society, be it between men and women, children and adults, or able and disabled. This paper looks at

how equity and quality of education can be achieved through non - formal education in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

There are many theories that explain the importance of non-formal education but this paper uses Deschooling to highlight how non-formal education can be used to enhance equity and quality of education in Nigeria. Ivan Illich (1926 - 2002), who was the founder of the Deschooling society theory severely criticized public schooling for its centralization, its internal bureaucracy, its rigidity and above all, inequities there present (Igbo, 2008). Illich further stated that the inability of most societies to decisively wipe out illiteracy and stem other forms of educational disadvantages such as truancy and drop-out is because the formal school system is too costly and so not affordable to many people; the experiences provided are restricted in space as the curriculum is often narrow; it contains more of theory and so less practical knowledge is given to the learners; and it is not flexible as it requires compulsory attendance and it is characterized by mass failure (Igbo, 2008). For instance, Illich has come to realize that for most men, the right to learn is curtailed by the obligation to attend school. He then sees schooling and education as diametrically opposed concepts. He begins by denouncing institutionalized education and institution of the school as producers of merchandise with a specific exchange value in a society where those who already possess a certain cultural capital derive the most benefit. Illich maintains that formal schooling cannot guarantee true mass education, that a good mass education system should have three purposes; to provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives, to make it possible for all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them, and to furnish all who want to present debatable issues to the public with the opportunity to make their arguments known (Igbo, 2008). All these cannot be said to be found in formal education, rather, they are the true features of non-formal education.

Deschooling theory is particularly relevant to this paper because it states clearly that formal schooling cannot guarantee equity and quality of education for all due to its inequalities and rigidity among other reasons. Therefore, non-formal education should be used as *de facto* to achieve equitable and quality education in Nigeria.

Formal Education

Nberu (1999) defined formal education as formal instruction based on a specific curriculum that is organized on certain subject areas, which takes place in an organized school setting, where teachers who are learned teach classes of students usually of the same age group. Basically, there are three levels of formal education in Nigeria, namely: Primary, Secondary and Higher Education.

World over, formal education is known to perform numerous functions which include: generation of knowledge through research; preservation and transmission of societal culture from one generation to another; provision of opportunity for upward social mobility; provision of opportunities for occupational role performance to individuals; it provides opportunities for social interaction which led to marriages, friendships and other social acquaintances (Nberu, 1999). However, in spite of the above vital functions that formal education provide, this type of education in Nigeria is bedeviled with numerous challenges that are making the achievements of the goals of equity and quality education near impossible.

The challenges related to quality in formal education generally revolve around inconsistency in educational policy and linked to this is the lack of implementation of policy to the later. Others are lack of adequate funding, with resultant effects manifest on staff related problems (Recruitment in adequate number, lack of constant training, and lack of good remuneration), lack of teaching and learning materials, and lack of good classrooms to meet up with the demand of the increasing enrolment in the public schools among others (Nberu, 1999).

On the issue of equity in education, Humphreys and Crawford (2015) opined that numerous gender related cultural practices linked to religion and/or lifestyle have significant influence on children's participation in formal schooling. The formal education setting is not conducive to the children of nomads (cattle herders and fishermen) attending these schools, and this is the reason why dropout rates are said to be high and learning outcomes low. It should be noted that nomadic communities "live in remote, difficult-to-access places, moving around and crossing borders (local, state, and international), with livelihoods that depend heavily on children's labour" (boys herd cattle in the morning and girls sell dairy products, thereby resulting to school absenteeism) (Humphreys and Crawford, 2015). In addition, the regular basic education curriculum of formal schools is unsuited to their needs, while school practices alienate them further (Usman cited in Humphreys and Crawford, 2015).

On gender disparities in educational participation, Humphreys and Crawford (2015) stated that "it exist at all levels of formal education nationally, with fewer girls than boys, on average, participating in and completing their basic education and continuing into post-basic and tertiary education". Barriers to girls' sustained and meaningful participation in formal education are multiple and interrelated, and are often connected to poverty that compelled her to hawk in other to earn money. Other issues include: parental/community attitudes; sibling care; early marriage/pregnancy; hunger/ill health; distance to school and concerns about safety; corporal punishment; gender violence including bullying and 'teasing' in school; and a lack of water and clean sanitation that assures privacy (Humphreys and Crawford, 2015)

The above show that providing access to formal education to marginalized groups such as nomadic communities and girl child is challenging. Thus, the easiest place they can find refuge is in the non-formal education.

Non-Formal Education (NFE)

Non-formal education is a systematic education that enhances educational access and promotes equity in learning opportunities. Often, many people thought and use non-formal education to simply mean adult education only, however, this cannot be so since some non-formal educational programmes involve young people, adolescents and even children such as the *Tsangaya* (Qur'anic centres), young farmers clubs, and youth empowerment programmes (Igbo 2008). Harbison cited in Ngwu (2006) states that non-formal education and training encompasses the entire range of learning processes and experiences outside the regular, graded school system. It thus includes everything from learning from parents, communication with others, and learning from experience to formal training on the job, apprenticeship, adult education and participation in organized out of school programmes such as youth's brigades, extension services, community development projects, and health and family-planning clinics. NFE organizes in a systematic way educational activities which are carried on outside the context of the formal school system aimed at providing a selected type of learning to particular sub-group in the population, be it adults, youth or children.

Non-formal education, like formal schooling, is a social product interpreting and interacting with the other institutional domains of society in which it resides (Hussain, 2014). Although many of its specific attributes, such as its organizational characteristics or its structure may differ from formal schooling, the overall socialization function it serves is similar because, it provides those who undergo its process with the competencies required by the society. Non-formal education is lifelong education that equips an individual with knowledge, skills and experiences throughout his/her lifetime. It is often used interchangeably with terms such as community education, adult education, lifelong education and second-chance education. This is because it refers to a wide range of educational initiatives in the community, ranging from home-based learning to government schemes and community initiatives.

Non-Formal Education Goals

The Policy Guideline for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education (2017) states the following goals of non-formal education that promote equity and quality education in Nigeria:

- Provides functional basic education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who left school very early,
- Provides remedial and lifelong education for youths and adults who did not complete secondary School,
- Provides further education for different categories of completers of the formal education system to improve their basic knowledge and skills,
- Provides in-service, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals to improve their skills, and
- Gives the adult citizens of the country aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

Achieving Equity and Quality of Education through Non-Formal Education in Nigeria

The issues of equity and quality of education often go hand-in-hand. This is because expanding access alone would be inadequate for education to contribute fully to the development of the individual and society. This therefore means importance has to accordingly be placed on assuring an increase in children's cognitive development by improving the quality of their education (UNESCO, 2005). That is the reason why Jomtien Declaration of 1990 also identified quality as a prerequisite for achieving the fundamental goal of equity and that the achievement of universal participation in education will be fundamentally dependent upon the quality of education available (UNESCO, 2005)

Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is focused on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting life-long learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2005). However, in Nigeria and many other low and middle-income countries, many children and adults lack access and quality education.

Qualitative Education

Qualitative education is that which provides all learners with capabilities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual well-being (Vande Vagnnise Overloid of Brussal, 2015). Expanding on the definition of quality, UNESCO (2005) states that quality sets out the desirable characteristics of learners (healthy, motivated students), processes (competent teachers using active pedagogies), content (relevant curricula) and systems (good governance and equitable resource allocation). Similarly, Onome (2018) states that quality education is central to improving the prospects of higher income levels for individuals, and for the economic growth and development of societies.

Non-formal education programmes have the potential to be of exceptionally high quality, because they can respond faster to the needs of individuals and specific groups in the community. The learning outcomes that are required vary according to context, but at the end of it all, the education provide the participants with such abilities like literacy and numeracy and a host of other life skills (Edqual, 2010). Yet, Indabawa and Mpotu cited in Lakan and Bello (2018) state that the principles and structures of non-formal education are among others flexible, participatory, problem-solving, functional, remedial, multi-purpose and lifelong. In consequence, it provides all the necessary measures disadvantaged individuals require to enable them to reduce the impact of such conditions and allow them achieve social integration, emotional balance, economic empowerment, physical fitness, mental stability, and above all, better quality of life that will lead to self-actualization in a participatory and friendly way (Lakan and Bello, 2018).

Equity in Education

The word equity simply means fairness to all. In relation to education, equity refers to a situation whereby personal and social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background are not allowed to be obstacles to individuals' ability to achieving their educational potential and that all

individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (VVOB, 2015).

Nomads in Nigeria are classical example of disadvantaged segments of the Nigerian population, who have serious limitation to equitable access to basic education through the conventional education system as a result of their occupational and socio-cultural peculiarities. Out of the estimated 15.4 million migrant groups in Nigeria comprising pastoralist, migrant fisher folks and migrant farmers, about 7.0 million are children of school going age of which only 594,230 are currently enrolled in schools (National Commission for Nomadic Education, 2016). Considering this, it can be said that participation of nomads in existing formal and non-formal basic education is extremely low. This then provides the justification for the nomadic education programme as a strategy for inclusiveness to basic education for nomads in Nigeria. Through nomadic education, which is one aspect of non-formal education, millions of children of pastoral nomads, migrant fishermen and migrant farmers outside the regular formal education system stand to get a chance to acquire qualitative functional inclusive basic education (NCNE, 2016).

Non Formal Education serves as a second-chance school for young married women who had to abandon their schooling either for marriage or because of pregnancy. The flexibility of non-formal education gives these women the opportunity to attend classes in the evenings while they leave their children with older siblings (UNICEF 2012). The training and the facilities provided to women by non-formal education vocational centres such as knitting and sewing machines and rice and maize threshing machines go a long way in providing economic empowerment to the women, which in turn enable them to live better life and even afford to educate their daughters (Okojie 2012). In addition, support to women that comes in form of micro-credit scheme also assist these women to own and run small businesses, that make them financially independent, and help them settle the cost of their daughters' education (Chege et al. 2008).

The introduction of Integrated Qur'anic and Islamiyya schools that uses integrated curriculum, which is also an aspect of non-formal education has brought about an upsurge in female enrolments in predominantly Muslims communities of the northern part of Nigeria since IQE schools are preferred for girls by many parents/guardians on the ground that the schools are safer for their girl child (Okojie 2008).

Other components of non-formal education that go a long way in bringing about equity in education includes: agricultural extension education that educate farmers on procedures of improving farming methods and techniques; functional literacy that helps people become conscious of themselves and their environment; and peace education that enables people to acquire values, knowledge and develop the attitudes, skills and behaviors to live in harmony with oneself, with others, and with the natural environment (James, 2008).

In addition, non-formal educational programmes that involve young people, adolescents and even children such as *Tsangaya* (Qur'anic centres), young farmers clubs, and youth empowerment programmes ensures equitable education to such group of people. Other learning programmes such as formal training on the job, apprenticeship, adult education and participation in organized out of school programmes such as youth's brigades, extension services, community development projects, and health and family-planning clinics are also components of non-formal education that can also contribute to wider access and quality education in Nigeria.

Furthermore, The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education policy guidelines (2017) states that equity can be achieved through non-formal education programmes by:

- a. Ensuring gender sensitivity, that will give women and men equal right to education and any form of discrimination based on gender should be prohibited,
- b. Providing for disadvantaged/vulnerable groups (IDPs, people with special needs etc) to be protected through state legislation and education,
- c. Ensuring that prison inmates also benefit from literacy, non-

- formal and continuing education provisions by creating and strengthening literacy/learning centres in correctional institutions,
- d. Reaching out to migrants and mobile communities to avail them with adult and non-formal education learning opportunities in their host communities, and
 - e. Ensuring that mechanisms are put in place to ensure that the *Almajiri* children, labourers and Artisans/Apprentices have access to basic education (NMEC, 2017).

Conclusion

This paper could be right to say that formal education is bedeviled with a lot of challenges so much so that it has not been able to bring about equity and quality education in Nigeria, and as such, the formal school system should not be offered as the only best educational option. While non-formal education is often considered as a second-best option to formal education, it should be noted that the former can provide equity and high-quality education more than that which is available in later. Since non-formal education can be used as preparatory, supplementary, complementary or an excellent alternative (where necessary) to formal schooling for all children and adult, there is therefore the need to accord due attention to mass literacy, adult and non-formal education so as a supplement the formal education in the quest for the realization of quality education and life-long learning for all in Nigeria.

Recommendations

At this juncture, this paper wishes to recommend the following:

- ü Federal, states and local governments should organize effective advocacy with major stakeholders on the importance of non-formal education programmes.
- ü Government should increase budgetary support for full implementation of mass literacy and non-formal education.
- ü International organizations, such as UNESCO and UNICEF should double their efforts in supporting mass literacy and other forms of non-formal education. This will go a long

way in complementing the efforts of federal, state and local governments toward achieving equity and qualitative education in Nigeria.

- ü Facilitators of non-formal education should be trained regularly so as to update and sharpen their skill which, will in turn enable them to effectively carryout their duties.

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