



Assuring Quality in Students' Practicum Experience in Adult and Non-Formal Education Programme: Challenges and Way Forward

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Abstract

The paper highlights the quest for Quality Assurance (QA) for standardisation in Adult and Non Formal Education practicum experience. A considerable attention has always been given to the quality of teaching and implementing adult and non formal education programmes, but little is paid to the students' practicum exercises. This has serious implications on the quality of skills attained by the students on graduation. An attempt has been made to assess the present status of quality assurance in students' practicum experiences. An effort is also made to discuss the development and validation of instruments for students' Practicum experience before, during and after the Practicum. It gives a general overview of various practices to guarantee quality assurance and to be in tandem with the current trends in global Quality Assurance practices. Life-coping and practical skills of critical observation, innovation, identification, measurement, comparative analysis, and interpretation of data in relation to the conduct of Practicum are discussed. The challenges against assuring Quality in Adult Education and Non Formal Practicum Programme were discussed, and the way forward was highlighted. The paper concludes that quality assurance is key for practical development of skills for certification in Adult Education Programmes. The paper recommends among others that adequate orientation and training should be organized for the students before proceeding on practicum assignment to lay the foundation for a quality-assured practicum each time the students go for the experience.

Keywords: Adult Education Programme, Challenges, Quality Assurance, Students' Practicum Experience; Way Forward

Introduction

The study of Adult and Non Formal Education in school aims to equip the learners with useful concepts, principles and theories that will enable such learners to solve prevailing problems and cope with life challenges. It is expected that such students who have been exposed to rigorous practicum experience and skills in the course should be able to solve some challenging life problems



effortlessly. Practicum activities provide opportunities for students to practically do and experience things themselves as opposed to knowing or learning about such things.

In consonance with the above, Nzewi (2008) asserted that practical activities can be regarded as a strategy that could be adopted to make the task of a teacher (teaching) more real to the students as opposed to the abstract or theoretical presentation of facts, principles and concepts of subject matters. He also maintained that practical activities should engage the students in hands-on, minds-on activities using varieties of instructional materials to drive the lesson home. However, Nwagbo (2008) opined that the use of practical activities or approaches to the teaching of concepts should, therefore, be a rule rather than an option for teachers if we hope to produce students that would be able to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and competence needed to meet the scientific and technological demands of the nation.

The quest for a better result-yielding approach to Adult and Non Formal Education programme that will lead to the acquisition of process skills has persisted over the years. This is hinged on the fact that the acquisition of skills is the basis for a sound scientific inquiry and the development of intellectual skills and attitudes that an individual needs to learn. Process skills are inherent and endowed abilities that individuals can develop and use in carrying out physical, mental and intellectual tasks. To Nwagbo and Chukelu (2011). The acquisition of process skills is the basis for scientific inquiry and the development of intellectual skills and attitudes needed to learn science concepts. Ajunwa (2000) was of the view that educators and curriculum experts modified them by either expanding or condensing them to suit their special needs or expectations.

Teaching and Learning Adult and Non Formal Education In The Field: What Does This Mean?

Teaching and learning in the field of adult and non-formal education is an essential aspect of lifelong learning, as it helps individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes that can be applied to various aspects of their lives. According to the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, adult education encompasses "all forms of learning undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training, often in the context of their work and personal lives" (UIL, 2013). On the other hand, non-formal education refers to any organized educational activity that takes place outside the formal education system and is designed to meet specific learning needs of individuals and communities (UNESCO, 2015). In the field of adult and non-formal education, teaching and learning strategies need to be tailored to meet the diverse needs of adult learners. Adult learners have unique characteristics, such as prior knowledge and experience, motivation, and expectations, which need to be considered in designing and delivering educational programs (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Teaching strategies that promote active participation, critical reflection, and collaboration are particularly effective in adult and non-formal education settings (UNESCO, 2015).

One of the key principles of teaching and learning in the field of adult and non-formal education is the recognition of prior learning. Prior learning refers to the knowledge, skills, and experience that learners bring to the learning process. This principle is based on the assumption that adults have accumulated knowledge and experience over time and that this knowledge can be built upon to enhance their learning (UIL, 2013). Therefore, educators need to take into account the learners' prior learning experiences and integrate them into the teaching and learning process. Another important aspect of teaching and learning in the field of adult and non-formal education is the use of technology. Technology has revolutionized how education is delivered and received, and it can



potentially enhance the teaching and learning experience for adult learners (UNESCO, 2015). For example, the use of online platforms, social media, and mobile devices can facilitate access to educational resources and support collaborative learning.

In conclusion, teaching and learning in the field of adult and non-formal education require innovative and flexible strategies that consider adult learners' unique characteristics and needs. Recognition of prior learning, active participation, critical reflection, collaboration, and the use of technology are some of the key principles that need to be considered in the design and delivery of educational programs.

Methodologies of Assuring Quality in Students' Practicum Experience in Adult and Non Formal Education

Most of the Adult and Non Formal Education Programmes and projects are activity-oriented. A typical classroom setting may be grossly inadequate for effective acquisition and transmission of knowledge and experience. To effectively learn the scientific skills of evaluation, measurement, recording, observation, manipulation and reportage skills, the individual learner must not only participate but be fully involved in the learning processes under the guidance of the facilitating teacher. Practicum experiences are a critical aspect of the learning process for students pursuing adult and non-formal education careers. These experiences provide students with the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations, gain hands-on experience, and develop skills essential for success in their chosen profession. However, ensuring the quality of practicum experiences is crucial to achieving the desired learning outcomes. This article explores some of the methodologies that can be used to ensure the quality of students' practicum experiences in adult and non-formal education.

Supervision: Supervision is a critical methodology for assuring quality in students' practicum experiences. Supervisors provide guidance and support to students, observe their performance, and provide feedback for improvement. Supervision should be regular, structured, and focused on achieving specific learning objectives. In addition, supervisors should have the necessary expertise and experience in adult and non-formal education to provide effective guidance and support to students.

Assessment: Assessment is another methodology for assuring quality in students' practicum experiences. Assessment should be designed to measure the attainment of specific learning outcomes and provide feedback for improvement. Assessment methods can include written assignments, oral presentations, and observation of practical skills. Assessment should be fair, valid, reliable, and provide constructive feedback to students.

Collaboration: Collaboration is a methodology that can enhance the quality of students' practicum experiences. Collaboration involves working together with other students, supervisors, and practitioners to achieve common goals. Collaboration can enhance the learning experience by providing opportunities for students to share ideas, learn from each other, and develop teamwork skills essential for adult and non-formal education success.

Reflection: Reflection is a methodology that can help students to identify and learn from their experiences during practicum. Reflection involves analyzing experiences, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and developing strategies for improvement. Reflection can help students to develop



critical thinking skills, self-awareness, and a deeper understanding of their professional roles in adult and non-formal education.

In addition to the methodologies discussed above, there are other strategies that can be used to ensure quality in students' practicum experiences in adult and non-formal education.

Clear Learning Objectives:

Clear learning objectives are essential for assuring the quality of students' practicum experiences. Learning objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). Clear learning objectives help students to focus their efforts on achieving specific outcomes and provide a clear framework for assessment and feedback.

Regular Feedback:

Regular feedback is crucial for assuring the quality of students' practicum experiences. Feedback should be timely, specific, and focused on achieving learning objectives. Feedback can be provided by supervisors, peers, and practitioners. Regular feedback helps students to identify areas of strength and weakness and provides opportunities for improvement.

Continuous Professional Development:

Continuous professional development is another strategy that can be used to assure the quality of students' practicum experiences. Professional development can involve attending conferences, workshops, and training sessions, as well as participating in professional organizations and networks. Continuous professional development helps students to stay up-to-date with the latest developments in their field and develop new skills and knowledge.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical considerations are also important for assuring the quality of students' practicum experiences. Practicum experiences should be designed to protect the rights and interests of all stakeholders, including students, clients, and practitioners. Ethical considerations can include issues such as confidentiality, informed consent, and cultural sensitivity. Ethical considerations help to ensure that practicum experiences are conducted in a responsible and professional manner.

However, the field of practice in practicum experience of adult learners includes the following:

A. The organization of the field trips and excursions to centres of interest, sites, locations and industries. This is to corroborate the theoretical knowledge learnt in the classroom. Field trips and excursions could be made to:

- i. Production and manufacturing industries and factories
- ii. Prison and Rehabilitation Centres
- iii. Trip to Literacy Centres
- iv. Federal and states owned media houses like print media and radio stations
- v. Ministry of Education
- vi. NMEC Headquarters and other regulatory agencies
- vii. Trip to nomadic and special education centres
- viii. Development centres and partners.



B. Active participation and engagement of students in project-oriented activities which will make them to utilize the available resources in the environment. Such activities include:

- i. The construction and rehabilitation of local roads and culverts.
- ii. Students could embark on environmental sanitation projects by evacuation of filth in the environment and subsequent management of the ecosystem.
- iii. Students could be engaged in anti-hard drugs campaign programmes.

C. Organization and supervision of activity-oriented class.

This could be achieved by:

- i. Programme Evaluation.
- ii. Naming and classifying programmes and projects in the community.
- iii. Studying the implications of citing a particular programme in a community.
- iv. Asking students to write a comprehensive report about their Practicum experience.

Significance of Quality Assurance in Students' Practicum Experience in Adult and Non Formal Education

Quality assurance is an essential aspect of students' practicum experience in adult and non-formal education as it ensures that the learning outcomes are achieved and that students are adequately prepared for their future careers. According to Kellough and Kellough (2008), quality assurance in practicum experiences involves the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the practicum program to ensure that it meets the required standards.

The significance of quality assurance in practicum experiences is multi-fold:

First, it ensures that students receive quality education and training that meets the standards set by the industry or profession they are preparing to enter (Cheung & Ngai, 2013).

Second, it provides an opportunity for students to apply the theories and knowledge they have acquired in the classroom to real-life situations, enhancing their understanding and practical skills (Egeberg & Bungum, 2019).

Third, it helps to identify areas where improvements are necessary to enhance the effectiveness of the practicum programme (Kellough & Kellough, 2008).

Other advantages of assuring quality in students' practicum experience in Adult and Non Formal Education include:

- a. **Development of scientific skills:** As a result of the practical exposure to some of the theoretical concepts learnt in the classroom, the students acquire some scientific skills in the field. Some of the skills include observation, manipulation, recording and measurement. In the fields, students can observe some of the natural events and phenomena, record and measure such events and possibly manipulate them.
- b. **It develops creative ability in individuals:** Creativity, as used in this context, could be intellectual creativeness or concrete creativeness. Creativity is developed by the translation of mentally conceived ideas into concrete reality.



- c. It provides a concrete experience for the learner: This is in conformity with the Piagetian intellectual development theory, which stresses the acquisition of concrete materials before abstract operations. This is actually an avenue for moving from concrete to abstract generalization, i.e. from seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching objects to formulation of policies.
- d. It provokes scientific thought among learners: As a result of the practical experience in the field, the model of thinking of the learners tend to be scientific in nature as explanation to events is given with scientific evidences but with less respect and credibility to traditional explanation of natural occurrences. This further provokes the agitated minds of the learner as to the questions of why, how, when and what causes these events.
- e. Perhaps one other advantage is the satisfaction of man's natural propensity or instinct to interact with his physical environment, such as the agricultural field, farm, forest, etc.

Challenges Associated with Quality Assurance in Adult Learners' Practicum Experience

The undermentioned are some of the problems and disadvantages associated with Practicum Experience in the field:

- i. The problem of funds:
- ii. The effectiveness of the field method could be hampered due to a lack of funds for field trips and excursions. Some of the students could be disadvantaged in terms of financial resources while making preliminary preparations for the field trip.
- iii. The method is time-consuming:
- iv. The method requires adequate preparations, careful instructions and participations to achieve success. However, it is sad to note that little time is allotted to the teaching and learning of Practicum Courses in most schools.
- v. Relative scarcity of some special places of interest to visit:
- vi. Due to the wide expanse of geographical space of Nigeria, some of the required places of interest are far apart or may not be readily available in some localities. Owing to this reason, the instructor and students have to travel long distances to visit these places. The risk of an accident is equally evident.
- vii. There are too many students in Practicum Classes; as such, the instructors may have to adjust and cope with the attendant behavioral problems.
- viii. Variability in Learning Needs: Adult learners have different learning needs and styles, making it challenging to ensure that each learner is receiving the support and guidance they need during their practicum experience. The variation in learning needs also makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the practicum experience for each individual learner.
- ix. Limited Resources: The availability of resources such as supervision, feedback, and evaluation tools can be limited. This can make it challenging to provide consistent quality assurance across all practicum experiences.
- x. Lack of Consistency in Practicum Settings: Practicum experiences can take place in a variety of settings, from hospitals to community organizations. The lack of consistency in these settings can make it challenging to develop and implement a standardized approach to quality assurance.



- xi. Limited Time: Practicum experiences are often time-limited, which can make it challenging to ensure that all necessary learning objectives are met and that the learners have had sufficient opportunity to apply their learning in real-world situations.
- xii. Communication Challenges: Effective communication between the practicum site, the learner, and the academic institution is critical for ensuring quality assurance. However, communication challenges can arise due to differences in expectations, language barriers, and time constraints.
- xiii. Ethical Considerations: Adult learners may work with vulnerable populations during their practicum experience, such as children or individuals with mental health issues. Ensuring that ethical considerations are met can be challenging, particularly if the learner works in a setting with limited resources or supervision.
- xiv. Legal Considerations: Practicum experiences may involve legal considerations, such as privacy and confidentiality requirements. Ensuring that these requirements are met can be challenging, particularly if the learner is working in a setting with limited legal expertise.

Implications for Open Distance Learning

Ensuring quality in students' practicum experience in adult and non-formal education programmes remains a challenge, and this has serious implications for Open Distance Learning.

One, effective supervision is crucial for quality assurance in practicum experiences. According to Rukavina and Gvozdanović (2020), supervision is a crucial element in ensuring the quality of practicum experiences, and it is essential for promoting the professional growth and development of students. Therefore, institutions offering ODL programmes must prioritize the provision of effective supervision to ensure the quality of practicum experiences.

Two, collaboration between academic institutions and host organizations is critical for successful practicum experiences. Badru and Ige (2020) noted that Collaboration with host organizations can enhance the quality of the practicum experience by providing students with opportunities to engage in real-world experiences and to apply their learning in a meaningful way. Therefore, ODL institutions must prioritize collaboration with host organizations to ensure the quality of practicum experiences.

Three, adequate preparation and support for students are essential for successful practicum experiences. According to Balogun and Adeyemi (2021), Students must be adequately prepared for practicum experiences and provided with ongoing support throughout their placement to ensure their success. Therefore, ODL institutions must prioritize the provision of adequate preparation and support to students to ensure the quality of practicum experiences.

Four, one of the critical aspects of ODL is the use of technology to facilitate learning. Therefore, institutions that offer ODL programmes must invest in technology to ensure that students have access to the necessary resources to support their learning. This includes ensuring the online learning platform is user-friendly and the technical infrastructure is reliable.

Five, ODL requires instructors to have specialized skills. ODL requires instructors to have specialized skills, such as online facilitation and course design, to ensure that students have quality



learning and practical experience. Instructors must create an engaging and interactive learning environment that promotes student engagement and fosters the development of critical thinking skills. Therefore, distance learning institutions must provide their instructors with training and support to help them develop the necessary skills. Implication

It is expected that ODL students should have a high degree of self-discipline and motivation. One of the critical challenges of ODL is ensuring that students have the self-discipline and motivation required to complete the programme successfully. ODL students must be able to manage their time effectively, set achievable goals, and stay motivated throughout the program. Therefore, institutions that offer ODL programmes must provide their students with the necessary support to help them develop these skills to assist them in their practicum experience.

In summary, ensuring quality in students' practicum experience in adult and non-formal education programmes remains a challenge in ODL. However, effective supervision, collaboration between academic institutions and host organizations, and adequate preparation and support for students are crucial for successful practicum experiences. ODL institutions must prioritize these factors to ensure the quality of practicum experiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, assuring the quality of students' practicum experiences in adult and non-formal education is a complex and multifaceted process. Supervision, assessment, collaboration, reflection, clear learning objectives, regular feedback, continuous professional development, and ethical considerations are all strategies that can be used to assure the quality of students' practicum experiences. Effective implementation of these strategies requires careful planning, coordination, and communication among all stakeholders involved in the practicum experience. By implementing these methodologies and strategies, students can gain the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary for success in their chosen profession. Therefore, one of the core courses and a prerequisite for the award of a degree in Adult and Non Formal Education in Nigeria, Practicum Courses are of great importance in determining and shaping the future of the students, and hence the practicality at this level is of paramount significance. The authors, therefore, were of the opinion that inadequate facilities and utilization will always serve as a cog in the wheel of progress and a hindrance to students' academic achievement in Practicum Courses. They were also of the view that a full-hearted implementation of the recommendations made below will greatly enhance the teaching, learning and conduct of Practicum courses in schools.

Recommendations and the Way Forward

1. Practicum courses in Adult and Non Formal Education should be prioritized in order to consolidate some of the gains mentioned above.
2. However, caution must be taken not to make it a sole method of teaching, rather an eclectic method or integration of other methods of teaching should be employed.
3. To solve the problem of funding, special grants and allocation should be budgeted for the planning and execution of the programme by the school administrators. Counterpart funding of projects and provision of logistics support can equally be sought from specialized international agencies like UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO and other professional bodies like NGOs, etc.



4. Moreso, special concession and priority should be given to Practicum courses by allotting adequate hours on the school academic timetables.
5. Develop a standardized framework: Developing a standardized framework for practicum experiences can help ensure consistency and quality assurance across different settings. This framework should outline the goals, objectives, evaluation criteria, and the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.
6. Provide adequate resources: To ensure quality assurance, adequate resources such as supervision, feedback, and evaluation tools should be provided. This will help to ensure that all learners receive the support and guidance they need to succeed in their practicum experience.
7. Collaborate with practicum sites: Collaboration with practicum sites is crucial to ensure that learners receive a quality learning experience. Academic institutions should work with practicum sites to establish clear expectations and responsibilities for all parties involved.
8. Train supervisors: Providing training for supervisors can help ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to provide quality supervision to learners. This training can include topics such as effective communication, ethical considerations, and legal requirements.
9. Establish clear communication channels: Effective communication is essential for ensuring quality assurance in practicum experiences. Academic institutions should establish clear communication channels between learners, supervisors, practicum sites, and academic staff to ensure that everyone is aware of their responsibilities and expectations.
10. Monitor and evaluate: Monitoring and evaluating the practicum experience is critical to ensure quality assurance. Academic institutions should regularly assess the effectiveness of the practicum experience and make necessary adjustments to ensure that learners receive a quality learning experience.
11. Engage in continuous improvement: Quality assurance is an ongoing process, and academic institutions should continuously seek feedback from learners, supervisors, and practicum sites to identify areas for improvement. Continuous improvement can help ensure that the practicum experience remains relevant, effective, and of high quality

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