

Adult Education for Entrepreneurial Proficiency in Nigeria: Challenges and Way Forward

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Abstract

Adult education has long been recognized as a critical pathway for personal and societal development. This however indicates that, the evolving dynamics of global economies, driven by technological advancements and the need for self-sustenance, call for a retooling of adult education to foster entrepreneurial proficiency. Entrepreneurial proficiency is considered to be specific skills, knowledge and abilities required by entrepreneur to start and manage an enterprise successfully. The aim of this paper is to critically examine Adult education for entrepreneurial proficiency in Nigeria: challenges and way forward. The paper identified lack of entrepreneurial focus in curricula, inadequate infrastructure and resources, insufficient qualified educators and low participation and motivation as major challenges affecting entrepreneurial proficiency in Nigeria. The paper recommends overhauling of audited curriculum in adult education, introduction of modern technologies, Training and recruitment qualified staff and adequate funding and policy

Keywords: Education, Adult Education, Entrepreneurial Proficiency, Entrepreneurial skills

Introduction

The relevance of adult education can be rooted in the fact that human beings have capacity to learn and also require long-life learning for existence (Zuofa, 2017). Interestingly, majority of the populace including governments in Nigeria, do not understand what adult education is in the first instance as well as its relevance. Among various ways adult education has been explained is that it is a process whereby adults engage in systemic and sustained learning activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes or values (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). In this context, adult education is seen as a concept that is central to all human development. It also follows that adult education is a tool for awareness creation about issues individuals and societies gain from (Zuofa, 2017).

Adult education, is any organized, systematic educational activity carried within the classroom (Singh, 2010); or outside the formal education system to provide selected types of learning to adults and

children (UNESCO, 2010). Adult education is a deliberate process of communicating ideas and developing skills in adults to participate more intelligently in economic and civic programmes to achieve other personal and social goals. Adult Education is further described as programmes or activities to encourage individuals of all ages especially adults and youths to enhance their abilities and potentials through formal, informal and non-formal education (Zuofa, 2006). According to her, this education is based on the individual's economic cultural, political, religious and social needs which should enhance their perception to face immediate and future challenges. United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2011) explain adult education as an important component of lifelong learning. During the international conference on adult education held in December 4th to 9th 2009, held in Belem, Brazil, the concept was expanded to mean, the entire body of ongoing learning process, formal or otherwise, where by people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their ability, enrich their knowledge and improve their technical or professional qualifications or, turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of the society (Kanothi 2009). This definition is remarkable in that it is all embracing and recognizes the flexibility of mode of delivery to individual adults in their immediate environment for their development and participation in the larger societies.

Adult education plays a crucial role in the empowerment of individuals, especially in developing economies like Nigeria. It provides opportunities for skills acquisition, literacy improvement, and lifelong learning, crucial for personal and professional development. However, in a rapidly changing world dominated by innovation, digitalization, and entrepreneurial opportunities, Nigeria's adult education system remains poorly aligned with the economic realities that demand proficiency in entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria, because the profile of the country with its diverse resources, attitude and culture encourages entrepreneurial education (Raimi, Sanni & Bello, 2010). When viewed as an academic endeavour, entrepreneurship can be defined as an act of inculcating specialized knowledge that entails teaching learners the skills of risk taking, innovation, arbitrage, and co-ordination of factors of production in the creation of products and services for economic needs (Kanothi, 2009).

Martina, Hana, and Jiri (2012) define entrepreneurial proficiency as a set of specific knowledge, abilities, skills, traits, motives, attitudes and values essential for the personal development and successful participation of each person in an organization. Rezaei-Zadeh, Hogan, O'Reilly, Cleary and Murphy (2014) define it as the abilities of the person that enable him to demonstrate the appropriate entrepreneurial behaviour including: identifying opportunities, start-up and maintenance of business. Sanda (2011) also refers to it as specific behaviour and characteristics of a person that result in effective or superior performance.

Paulienè, (2017) define entrepreneurial proficiency as a set of related knowledge, attributes and skills that give an individual the capability to perform an activity or task within a particular function or job. Entrepreneurial proficiency can be described as those characteristics exhibited by an individual that can be used to explain efficient, effective or superior performance in a given assignment. In defining competency of an entrepreneur, characteristic of risk taking is important without which profit making could be difficult (Pepple & Enuoh, 2020).

Entrepreneurial proficiency has also been defined to include some entrepreneurial behavior that enables an entrepreneur to identify business opportunities, set up and manage a business successfully with the identified opportunities (Yusoff & Lame, 2017).

Shane and Venkataraman (2000) argue that entrepreneurial proficiency is fundamentally about the ability to identify, evaluate, and exploit opportunities. They emphasize that proficient entrepreneurs have the cognitive and social skills to recognize opportunities that others may overlook and have the resourcefulness to bring these opportunities to fruition.

Entrepreneurial proficiency refers to the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to start, manage, and grow a business successfully. It involves understanding market trends, financial management, business strategy, and innovation. According to Hisrich and Peters (2002), entrepreneurship proficiency is not just about the ability to create a business but also the capacity to sustain and scale it in the face of competition and market dynamics.

Fayolle and Gailly (2008) discuss entrepreneurial proficiency as a key educational outcome of entrepreneurship programmes. They define it as the ability of an individual to effectively apply the knowledge, skills,

and attitudes acquired through education to real-world entrepreneurial activities. They emphasize that entrepreneurship proficiency is not innate but can be developed through targeted education and training programmes.

Garcia-Morales, Jimenez-Barrionuevo and Gutiérrez-Gutierrez, (2014) link entrepreneurial proficiency to innovation, suggesting that proficient entrepreneurs possess the skills to foster innovation within their businesses. They define proficiency as the capacity to implement new ideas, processes, or products that lead to competitive advantage. This definition underscores the importance of creativity, strategic thinking, and technological competence as key elements of entrepreneurship proficiency.

Retooling Adult education for entrepreneurship Proficiency in Nigeria

In many countries, adult education has been utilized to bring in equitable distribution of the opportunities of society (Singh, 2010). In the twenty-first century all individuals need to develop the capacity to be creative and innovative at work and in their communities, because the world of work is undergoing major transformations caused by technological change, shifts in the global economy, new business models, and demographics (Lindner, 2020). Not surprisingly, organizations like United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO, the European Commission (EC), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD (2018), and the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2019) recognize the importance of enabling entrepreneurship as a way to drive growth. However, the perceived growth in entrepreneurship is to build the capacity of young adults to become self-employed. After all, young adults are often the first casualty when redundancy is declared at workplace. However, this step can be realized when education and training of young adults is placed high in high demand. Another observation is that sustainable enterprises are a priority for the whole education system (Lindner, 2020); including adult education.

King, (2017), noted that entrepreneurial training, organization of workshops, seminars, and symposia on small businesses in the communities (Biney, 2021), business training and start-ups management training and enhancement of confidence (Jonsdottir, 2006), and farmer training programmes and adult literacy programmes and occupational skill training (UNESCO, 2010) will be beneficial to young adults. This constitutes some examples of adult

education programmes. Youth clubs with educational purposes and community programmes of instruction in health, nutrition, family planning, cooperatives and entrepreneurship are also Adult education programmes (UNESCO, 2010).

Nafukho and Muyia (2010) argue that students who have taken an entrepreneurship course have learned to be creative and innovative, and should seek to be employment creators and not job seekers. However, such trained students can only be successful in their entrepreneurial drive when they continue to participate and get involved in short training programmes such as entrepreneurship workshops, seminars, and management bootcamps to build on their already acquired knowledge, skills, values and understanding. Such training programmes are Non Formal Education (NFE), and are practically oriented. The knowledge and skills acquired in the training programmes are immediately applied to solve problems (Shane & Venkataraman, (2000). This supports Singh's (2010) assertion that NFE focuses on the learner's needs, and uses the learner as a resource, and stresses on relevant activities and practical outcomes.

Challenges of Nigeria's Entrepreneurial Proficiency through Adult Education

Below are the major challenges that affect entrepreneurial proficiency through adult education:

1. Lack of Entrepreneurial Focus in Curricula

One of the major challenges facing adult education in Nigeria is the lack of entrepreneurial content in curricula. Adult education programmes have traditionally focused on literacy, with little regard for equipping learners with practical skills that can be applied to entrepreneurship. Akinyemi (2019) notes that while adult education in Nigeria has contributed to basic literacy, it has not adequately addressed the needs of learners who wish to start businesses or enhance their employability.

2. Inadequate Infrastructure and Resources

The infrastructural challenges in Nigeria also impact adult education. Many adult learners do not have access to modern educational resources such as computers, internet connectivity, or even basic learning materials (Akinyemi 2019). This lack of resources limits the ability of adult education centers to offer comprehensive training

programmes that include entrepreneurship skills. In rural areas, where entrepreneurship could be particularly transformative, the absence of necessary infrastructure severely constrains access to quality adult education (Yahaya, 2018).

3. Insufficient Qualified Educators

Another critical challenge is the shortage of qualified educators trained in both adult learning methodologies and entrepreneurship. Adult learners have unique educational needs that differ from those of younger students (Obanya 2011). Educators in adult education programmes must be able to provide practical, real-world insights into entrepreneurship. However, many adult education instructors in Nigeria lack the necessary background or training in business-related fields, which diminishes the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education (Ekong & Ekong, 2016).

4. Low Participation and Motivation

Adult education programmes in Nigeria also face low participation rates due to various socio-economic factors. Adults, particularly in rural and low-income areas, often cannot afford to leave their jobs or family responsibilities to attend educational programmes. Moreover, many do not see the immediate economic benefits of participating in education programmes that are perceived to be focused on literacy rather than practical skills (Adewumi, 2020). This reduces the appeal of adult education programmes, limiting their ability to produce proficient entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

Adult education plays a crucial role in the empowerment of individuals, especially in developing economies like Nigeria. It equips the adult learner with opportunities for skills acquisition, literacy improvement, and lifelong learning, crucial for personal and professional development. It is however mind blowing to say that rapidly changing world dominated by innovation, digitalization, and entrepreneurial opportunities, Nigeria's adult education system remains poorly aligned with the economic realities that demand proficiency in entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship proficiency refers to the combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and abilities that enable an individual to successfully initiate, manage, and grow a business venture. This proficiency goes beyond simply starting a business; it encompasses competencies that allow entrepreneurs to navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and innovate in the face of competition. As the global economy becomes more complex and dynamic, the need for entrepreneurial proficiency is increasingly emphasized, especially in developing economies such as Nigeria, where entrepreneurship is seen as a critical vehicle for job creation and economic growth (Adeleke & Makinde, 2021). This in no doubt calls for retooling in order to attain a level of development.

Retooling adult education for entrepreneurial proficiency in Nigeria is a powerful towards achieving national development. By equipping adults with entrepreneurial skills, Nigeria can create a more resilient workforce capable of innovating, adapting, and contributing to economic growth. The paper identified lack of entrepreneurial focus in curricula, inadequate infrastructure and resources, insufficient qualified educators and low participation and motivation as major challenges affecting entrepreneurial proficiency in Nigeria. .

Recommendations

The paper however put forward some recommendation that must be put in place so as to ensure entrepreneurial proficiency through adult education in Nigeria:

There is need for curriculum overhauling in adult educational system. Adult education curricula need to incorporate entrepreneurship modules that include financial literacy, innovation, and business development. This was supported by Obanya (2011): he noted that

entrepreneurship education should focus on both theoretical and practical aspects of running a business. Through this, adult learners can have a grasp of the reality when it comes to business.

There is need to inculcate the application of modern technologies. Technology can be an effective tool in reaching adult learners, especially in rural areas. E-learning platforms and mobile applications can provide access to entrepreneurial courses, financial management tools, and mentorship opportunities (Okoye & Ofoegbu, 2018). This will make learning more convenient for adult learners.

Training and recruitment of more qualified staff is a necessity in educational centres. This will enable the trainers to broaden their horizon in the areas of effective delivery services. Business incubators and mentorship programmes should be inculcated in training as this will provide adult learners with real-world experience.

The need for adequate funding and policy support cannot be overemphasized. Government and private sector support is crucial in funding adult education programmes tailored toward entrepreneurship. The Nigerian government should develop policies that encourage entrepreneurship education at all levels, including adult learning (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020).

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