

INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION OF OLDER ADULTS IN EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING IN NIGERIA: ANALYSED FROM COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This article demonstrates how inclusive education can contribute to the empowerment of older adults and their families to effectively cope with, and adjust to the challenges of globalization, modernization and migration. Using literature search, this article attempts to (a) critically examine the view and conceptualization of inclusive education as being imperative only for younger students and other young people with disabilities, (b) demonstrate the importance of adult education and lifelong learning as means of responding to the needs of older adults with chronic illnesses and functional disabilities in Nigeria, (c) explore areas where inclusive education, adult education and lifelong learning can respond to the needs of uninsured and underserved older adults with undiagnosed and untreated health and social challenges particularly at the local level in Nigeria, (d) examine how universities can initiate, promote and sustain lifelong learning for older adults including older workers in universities in Nigeria. The major findings of the literature search indicate that for inclusive education to be effective in Nigeria in an era of globalization, modernization, and migration, its concerns cannot ignore (a) the imperatives of lifelong learning education for people of all ages and sexes, (b) the learning needs of increasing population of the cohort of older adults including the indigent and poor elders with chronic illnesses and functional disabilities, (c) the social and digital inclusion of older adults that are poor and without family support system, (d) the inclusion of educational, health and social services for older workers in Nigerian universities and elderly parents, and (e) the interdisciplinary collaborative approaches of inclusive educators, professional counsellors, social workers, gerontologists, and psychologists in providing counselling and therapeutic for chronically sick adults and their parents.

Keywords: Inclusive education, digital inclusion, lifelong learning for older adults, counselling, globalization.

Introduction

Inclusive education in which people of all ages and sexes are involved is a basic essential step towards sustainable and balanced development in society. In our dynamic world, roles, the concerns, or activities of professions and academic disciplines are being extended to accommodate and address changing circumstances and emerging challenges. And so, inclusive education or education for all in an era of globalization which poses new challenges for people of all ages cannot be achieved where adult education and lifelong learning have been ignored. Using counselling and psychological perspectives, this article attempts to establish the extent to which older adults have opportunities for social, educational inclusion in Nigeria. There is provision for adult and non-formal education in the National Policy on Education (2004) as means of lifelong education. While it addresses functional literacy and continuing education for adults, there is the need to obtain scientific data on the extent to which adult and non-formal education in Nigeria empowers older adults, illiterate and poor older adults with chronic illnesses and functional disabilities to have lifelong learning, lifelong knowledge and skills in the country for coping with challenges in an era of globalization. Using literature search, this article attempts to (a) critically examine the view and conceptualization of inclusive education as being imperative only for younger students and other young people with disabilities, (b) demonstrate the importance of adult education and lifelong learning as means of responding to the needs of older adults with chronic illnesses and functional disabilities in Nigeria, (c) explore areas where inclusive education, adult education and lifelong learning can respond to the needs of uninsured and underserved older adults with undiagnosed and untreated health and social challenges particularly at the local level in Nigeria, (d) examine how universities can initiate, promote and sustain lifelong learning for older adults including older workers in universities in Nigeria in line with the thinking of Tikkanen & Nyhan (2006), (e) describe what university-based inclusive education for poor and illiterate older adults to enable them meet their educational, learning and digital needs so that they will not be left behind in the use of ICT skills that can improve the quality of their lives and social engagement in an era of globalization and modernization, and (e) recommend how counsellors, gerontologists, school social workers and psychologists can apply their knowledge and skills to motivate of older workers and retirees to participate in adult education and lifelong learning in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Inclusive education for balanced and sustainable development is ethically expected to cover all segments of the population of a country; education regardless of its type, is a right and as-such both the younger and older generations are entitled to it.

According to Ejikeme (2014), concerns about the survival, development, protection and participation of the younger generations in society are inevitable, socially desirable and expedient especially for a nation's growth and development. It is said that *everyone grows older* and that *the young shall grow*. The younger people of today will grow and develop to be older adults some day. And so, they need proactive care for them to have successful trips to successful aging. For the younger generations especially children and the youth of Nigeria to effectively serve as agents of continuity and sustainability of the contribution of the older generation to society, their health, nutritional, educational, learning, housing, security, recreational and fitness needs should be adequately met. Emphasis on early childhood education will sure reduce the number of adults without formal education in Nigeria. In other words, investment in the education of children and adults will enable grow and develop into educated older adults with economic security who will not depend largely and indefinitely on charity or on other people for social support, feeding, housing and social security services.

However, a problem can arise where the focus of the provision of educational, healthcare and social services is on the younger generation to the neglect of the educational, learning, and social inclusions needs other subsections of the population of a country such as older adults that are underserved and left behind in the provision of educational, lifelong learning, security and safety, health and social welfare services. Older adults, as human beings, have health, educational, learning, nutritional, housing Where meeting the welfare needs of the younger generations means the neglect of older adults with chronic illnesses and functional disabilities, then there would be some inequitable or misdistribution instead of balanced distribution of health and social services (Ejikeme, 2014, pp. 16-19). The disempowering view of inclusion in education as being an imperative only for students with special educational challenges is giving way to a more proactive and empowering concept of education for all and lifelong learning programmes that include older adults in need of continued education and lifelong learning in order to successfully cope with, and adjust to the stressful challenges of globalization and modernization including scientific and technological changes, find meaning in life, have happiness, fulfillment and satisfaction in life for the rest of their lives.

According to Wikipedia (1993), “the *ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated* pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. Therefore, it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development, but also self-sustainability, rather than competitiveness and employability” (p.1). Taylor (1993) explained that “lifelong learning is not restricted by time and place. It is for everyone and can occur from birth to death, in diverse settings, within and outside the school, and is not restricted to the period of childhood” (p.1). With the weakening of the extended family support system and increasing diversion of care towards the nuclear family in Nigeria largely due to globalization modernization, and migration, the tendency is for middle-aged adults who fend for their biological children in cities to hire informal care

givers to provide in-home help or services to their chronically sick parents in both rural and urban areas in the country, especially when they lose the ability to live independently at home due to functional disabilities. While, middle-aged and older adults serving in Nigerian universities may be covered by the National Health Insurance Scheme, there may be no educational, health and social programmes and services at the institutional, local, state, and national levels that can respond to the educational, learning and health and social security needs of their parents in both rural and urban populations in the country.

In a dynamic world, marked by rapid social change older adults in academics and the universities they serve have ever-evolving needs, interests and concerns and for them not to be left behind in activities that serve educational needs of older adults in academics, they need to cope with and adjust to the challenges of globalization and modernization such as lifelong learning, retraining, transfer of learning, the use of ICT, work-related stress, and preparation for retirement years. A facility like *Seniors in Motion* (SIM), which is a programme for older adults in America, can serve as a model for Nigerian universities. The programme which can be located in a University Staff Club, or very close to campus, has that features that can socially engage seniors by providing them with the opportunity for regular physical exercise and education. The facility can use medical, guidance and counselling and social work students as volunteers and even create employment opportunities for university graduates. It is a proactive or preventive programme because it enables seniors to achieve fitness through exercise and wellness through education. It enables them prevent falls and auto crashes due to intoxication or substance abuse. The education component of the facility makes it preventive. Seniors are educated on the right nutrition, fall prevention, relapse prevention and are encouraged to use muscle relaxation, and laughter instead of pills to live healthier, happier and longer lives.

Adult education and lifelong learning programmes as Torres (2004) noted are important as effective means of achieving the inclusion of older adults in education, supporting their wellbeing, combating ageism and enlightening younger generations on the implications of aging, how to prepare for the challenges of aging and relate better to older adults.

Torres (2004) carried out a study with a focus on basic learning needs of older adults for human development in developing countries including Nigeria and obtained research findings which demonstrated that “a dual standard and educational agenda is being shaped where lifelong learning is actively adopted in developed countries while basic education is promoted in developing countries, and adult education and lifelong learning have been ignored in recent international initiatives” (p.1). Torres also provided further evidence to show that older adults are not adequately covered by inclusive education in terms of adult education and lifelong learning in developing countries including Nigeria as follows: “older adults and men are being neglected as target groups for educational purposes; poor children and their parents are being forced to compete in

terms of educational priorities; and major gaps exist between rhetoric and educational practice” Torres (2004) made the following recommendations for achieving education for all and lifelong learning in developing countries:

lifelong learning must be adopted as a paradigm for all countries; education must be framed within and supported by major social and economic reform; education and learning must be oriented towards social transformation and human development; an inclusive education and learning model needs to be developed; learning must be effective, meaningful and sustainable; learning communities will need to be built in order to build a learning society; complexity and heterogeneity must be acknowledged (p. 1)..

According to Williams & Torrens (2008), the United States population has grown tremendously in recent years due to some major factors such as the “rate of natural increase” arising from increased births and declining mortality rates and “net immigration” (p. 45). A good chunk of the concern of education and healthcare reforms in any society is the increasing number of the members of society’s population of different age groups left behind and not covered by educational, health, and social services or not insured for healthcare services. Swan (2008) drew attention to the global trend whereby there is a new phenomenon in the unprecedented aging of America and other societies- a trend described as having serious implications for programmes and services for older adults. Globally, there is a demographic transition in which people are living longer than before, that is, people are living beyond the age of 65 which happens to be the retirement age in most countries of the world. The reasons for the increasing proportions of populations over given ages, as stated in the lecture, include (a) people born tend to live longer especially due to modern medical care and (b) there is also a general drop in “birth rates, resulting in relatively more older people and relatively fewer children in the world population” (p.1). Nigeria is less developed than America is and has some cultural values that differ from those of America and so aging in Nigeria differs from what it is in America especially due to the socioeconomic and cultural differences between the two countries. The increasing population of older adults in Nigeria as developing country presents more serious problems for providers of programmes and services than it does in America which is a developed country that has long experienced its proportion age increase, and has more resources for facing the challenges arising from the aging of its population.

Characteristics and Situations of the older adults especially in the rural communities of the country:

1. Increasing elderly population with disabilities
2. The co-occurring substance abuse, physical and mental health disorders of frail elders are often undiagnosed and untreated.
3. Many of the older adults lack income and are indigent and poor

4. The extended family support systems for elders are shrinking especially in the rural communities largely due to globalization and migration.
5. Few frail elders with disabilities whose urban-based children are economically secured and are caring, are often evacuated from their rural communities to cities in search of quality home care, aids, health or nursing care.
6. People employed to provide home care to sick older adults in their homes in cities are neither trained nor certified as care givers.
7. People employed to provide home care to sick older adults in their homes in cities tend to lack job satisfaction, and use low levels of social and emotional intelligence in responding to their work-related stress.
8. People employed to provide home care to sick older adults in their homes in cities need provider education to enable them cope effectively with caregiver stress and serve the elders better.

Implications of Increasing Cohort of Older Adults for their Inclusive Education Needs

Literature evidence exists to attest to the view that the increasing population of the cohort of older adults in Nigeria has implications for inclusive education in the country. For instance, Doyle & Goldingay (2012) have an evidence-based report that makes an original contribution to the present understanding of how the educational and social inclusion of older adults can be adequately met by combating obstacles that make underserved older adults to be left behind in the provision of inclusive education in a virtual world. Doyle & Goldingay (2012) demonstrated that “as the cohort of older adults continues to grow in Europe and America, concerns are also increasing about how to adequately meet their unique needs” including their health, educational, learning, nutritional, fitness, housing, and social security needs in an era of increasing use of new Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in activities of daily living. These researchers also suggested that “ensuring social connectedness and inclusion is one way to support older adults’ wellbeing” in any society (p.1). In the thinking of the researchers, online social networking is rapidly becoming a way of life among the younger generations, and so, its prospects and usefulness as means of (a) reducing empty nest syndrome, isolation, loneliness, depression, suicidal wishes and (b) facilitating social engagement, fulfillment, life satisfaction, happiness, and relevance among older adults in era of increasing digitization are being explored.

Prospects and Problems of Educational and Digital Inclusion of Older Adults

The large, multimedia, digital white board in a teaching-learning environment with high speed internet connectivity enables lecturers and their students interact in an intellectually and perceptually stimulating situation and also derive benefits from e-resources that can enhance their contribution to best practices globally. For educators involved in the provision of adult education and learning to be effective in a virtual

society they need to be familiar with the use of Information and Communication Technology and related items of technology in ways that can enhance adult basic education and learning in a virtual world. Past examination questions are digitized in the library for students to download and print at minimal costs. Older adults aged beyond 65 years effectively use interactive white boards, digital projectors, three-dimensional (3D) computer graphics, prepare their posters and slides for PowerPoint presentations in academics in industrialized countries such as America. Insight from the functional abilities of seniors in motion as educators particularly in tertiary educational institutions in America can be adapted to enhance online social networking and social inclusion for older adults in the Nigerian context. Inclusive education should have aspects that can support older adults to enable them engage in lifelong activities, particularly in relation to the use of ICT skills to improve the quality of their lives and social engagement.

Insight from social, educational and Digital Inclusion of Older Adults in Europe and America

The lesson here for online social networking, education and social inclusion for older adults in Nigeria is that their regular and special educators need ICT skills in order to avoid some embarrassment in a teaching-learning situation on the account of being left behind in a knowledge-based, virtual world. For this to happen, lecturers should make effort to have the knowledge and skills of using these modern technologies to surf the Net for databases, e-mails poster preparation, and PowerPoint presentations. They should also demonstrate the capacity to handle portable document format, prepare their posters and slides for PowerPoint presentations; the mere possession of 3D computer graphics, ostentatious display of laptops, ipads, smart phones and other technologies in their offices without using them effectively in academics cannot contribute to quality teaching and learning in Nigerian universities. Irregular supply of electricity and ever-fluctuating Internet services are problems that can frustrate the digital inclusion of older adults especially at the local level in Nigeria. Uninterrupted or regular supply of electric power is a critical resource that supports administrative and academic activities including the use of modern information and communication technology in academic and administrative activities in providing education for all and lifelong education.

What roles might Nigerian Universities play in creating inclusive education for older adults?

In America, lifelong education is emphasized as means of empowering seniors age successfully and gracefully in place. Education is a strong force for occupational and social mobility. It can stimulate critical thinking and creativity, enhance problem solving, facilitate functional independence, liberate young and old people from ignorance, poverty, oppression, exploitation, intimidation, feelings of functional fixedness, insecurity, inferiority, inadequacy, and learned helplessness. Lifelong education and adult education facilities enable and empower older adults in America to know their rights to

health insurance programmes such as Medicare and Medicaid, adult protective services, and the need to engage in mental exercise, regular physical exercise for fitness, education for wellness, assisted nutrition, assisted housing programmes. First, Nigerian should ensure that there is effective life-long education for older adults in line with the American model. According to Swan's (2008) Lecture Note:

Amendments to the OAA in 1987 provided a mandate to Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) to act as information gatherers and disseminators of information on higher-education opportunities for elders in localities. Other laws that influenced elder education policy were the Lifelong Learning Act (1976) and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, which set policy and otherwise enhanced lifelong learning. Likewise the Office of Vocational Adult Education established priorities for elder education. An important aspect of all of these legislative and program initiatives is that they did not fund elder education in more than a minimal degree, rather established policy and planning that influenced many states and localities to fund lifelong learning. For example, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act explicitly included elders among targets for adult education, emphasizing the achievement of literacy and acquisition of GED education.

Further evidence of the positive involvement of American Universities in the education of Seniors is captured in the following portion of Swan's (2008) report:

Higher education institutions have long seen elders as important adjuncts to their student pools, expanding the numbers of warm bodies in classrooms. About three-fourths of the states have tuition-waver programs; and many institutions lower academic barriers to entry for students above the traditional "college age." Even if tuition is waived, older students are still counted in state support to public colleges and universities. Programs giving college credit for past work experience also constitute a major incentive for elders to seek higher education. As a result, many elders, women in particular, are in higher education degree programs. Further, while non-degree continuing education programs have long been important adjuncts to higher education, those aimed at elders have gained in prevalence and prominence – as with the Grandparents University and Emeritus College here at UNT. The Emeritus College features year-round non-credit classes for elders, while the Grandparents University brings together grandparents and their grandchildren for summer educational experiences together.

Everyone gets older and so, the Nigerian boys and girls of today are future older men and women. And so, Nigerian universities should encourage early childhood education as means of producing people who will be educated older Nigerians in future. Educational programmes including inclusive education of universities should contribute

to the development of lifelong learning opportunities for people of all ages and both sexes including older adults.

Closing the Gender Gap in Education in Nigeria: Girl Child Education

Bridging the gender gap in education in Nigeria, a situation in which there are more males than females at the various levels of education in most states in the country, has been a difficult task due to some cultural and socioeconomic problems in the country. It varies from one level of education to the other and from course to course. Education for all and lifelong learning will improve life expectancy and quality of life of all and reduce dependency rates in Nigeria.

Counselling Aspects of Inclusion Education for Older Adults

Counselling is subsumed in inclusive education. For inclusive education to impact positively on the quality of life and functioning of older adults on a scale that will enable them to cope with, and adjust to the rapid rate of social and other challenges of globalization and modernization, its content must address the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of their behavior and for this to happen, the involvement of counselling, human services, and social work approaches cannot be ignored in the delivery of inclusive education, adult education, and lifelong learning programmes. In the delivery of inclusive education, adult education and lifelong learning settings the involvement of counsellors is important for changing the attitudes, lifestyles and behavior of older adult learners for the better.

Needs Assessment

The imperativeness of needs assessment in determining the goal of educational services such as counselling services for older adults in need of lifelong learning in a dynamic world is a critical issue and as-such cannot be ignored. This is because a basic essential step towards the provision of counselling services to older adults whose thoughts and behavioural process can exacerbate their general medical problem is to carry out the assessment and diagnosis of their psychosocial functioning, literacy level, social support networks, housing facilities, and family dynamics. For instance, the information services of professional counsellors can be used to contribute to nutrition education for older adults, digital inclusion of older adults, and social inclusion of older adults. Various counselling approaches or modes can be applied to achieve the involvement of older adults in basic education, inclusive education, adult education and lifelong learning. Counsellors can ensure the sustainability of the involvement of older adults in lifelong learning activities as means of promoting their survival, development, protection, and participation in social life in an era of globalization. The inclusion of older adults in adult education and lifelong learning can be facilitated through proactive counselling that can enable achieve fall prevention, and relapse prevention among older adults that are recuperating or recovering from chronic alcohol abuse that lack the

psychological resources to cope with, and adjust to the effects of traumatic and stressful life events and hospitalization and then gain appreciable psychosocial stability and functional independence.

Adult counselling programmes and services including information services can be used (a) to educate older adults on the hazards, health and social risks, of adult substance abuse, (b) how to prevent the exacerbation of aging problems due to substance abuse and other patterns of high-risk behavior and lifestyles, (c) how to achieve a smoke free workplace for older workers. Effective counselling and referral service can be used to empower older adults with undiagnosed and untreated substance-related disorders to seek timely and appropriate behavioural and medical interventions. Social networking, social engagement, or social inclusion for older adults at risk for acute or chronic diseases and functional disabilities can be achieved in schools and non-school settings such as families, workplace, hospitals, hospices, rehabilitation centres, nursing homes, or ambulatory settings. Inclusive education for older adults that incorporates counselling can prevent caregiver stress during long-term care for older adults with chronic illnesses and functional disabilities, and also enable the sick elders to be healthier and happier in homes in Nigeria. Where counsellors and other human service providers are effective in educating, training or counselling in-home caregivers to be effective in providing care for chronically sick elders with functional disabilities in homes, the children and relations of these sick elders living and working in distant places are relieved of the burden and stress of always being around their elderly loved ones with chronic illness at the expense of their educational and occupational obligations. This is one of the ways counsellors can prevent anxiety, stress and burnout disorders especially among urban-based, both working and unemployed middle-aged adults faced with threatening, scary, and disturbing challenges of caring for their chronically sick elderly parents with functional disabilities in their villages. But where professional counselling, health and social services are not available for chronically sick older adults and their in-home care givers especially in rural populations, then the children or family members of the chronically sick adults residing, studying and working in distant urban centres will be subjected to severe stress arising from role conflicts and role strains. In addition to their moral and financial obligations to their nuclear families in cities, which are primary, these urban-based workers are often compelled, in line with social expectations and demands of the extended family support system, take some time out of their workplaces to attend to their sick parents who are rural dwellers, especially if they cannot accommodate them in cities for care. The training of unemployed school leavers by gerontologists, professional counsellors, psychologists and social workers to serve as caregivers to chronically ill elders with functional disabilities in homes in homes will create job opportunities for school leavers in Nigeria.

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Conclusion

As noted earlier, everyone gets older. And so, everyone, every profession, or academic discipline concerned about human development should contribute to successful aging. Basic education, inclusive education, adult education and lifelong education can help older adults live longer, healthier, better and happier lives on their own in Nigeria. In our ever-evolving, changing world, roles, the concerns, or activities of professions and academic disciplines are being extended to accommodate and address changing circumstances and emerging challenges. For inclusive education to be effective in Nigeria in an era of globalization, modernization, and migration, its concerns cannot ignore (a) the imperatives of lifelong learning education for people of all ages and sexes, (b) the learning needs of increasing population of the cohort of older adults including the indigent and poor elders with chronic illnesses and functional disabilities, (c) the social and digital inclusion of older adults that are poor and without family support system, (d) the inclusion of educational, health and social services for older workers in Nigerian universities and elderly parents, and (e) the interdisciplinary collaborative approaches of inclusive educators, professional counsellors, gerontologists, social workers and psychologists in providing counselling and therapeutic services for chronically sick adults and their parents. The extent to which educational programmes including inclusive education for older adults in Nigerian universities provide support to them to enable them engage in lifelong activities, particularly in relation to the use of ICT skills to improve the quality of their lives and social engagement should be of great concern to all educators including inclusive educators in Nigeria. This is because, we live in a rapidly changing, complex world that is becoming increasingly complex. Many older adults and other cohorts of the Nigerian population experience difficulty and severe stress in coping with the rapid rate of change in an era of globalization. This article demonstrates how inclusive education can contribute to the empowerment of older adults and their families to effectively cope with, and adjust to the challenges of globalization, modernization and migration. Older adults have wealth of experience in diverse areas of life and serve as mentors to younger generations and so can provide valuable resource that can be used in developing basic education and inclusive education.

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