

## ADULT EDUCATION FOR MARGINALIZED GROUPS: ISSUES AND INTERVENTIONS

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### Abstract

*Adult education involves adults participating in systematic and ongoing self-education to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values, with the goal of addressing societal socio-economic, cultural, political, and environmental challenges. Unfortunately, marginalized groups like girls, women, rural residents, people with disabilities, internally displaced persons (IDPs), the elderly, and low-income earners often face significant systemic barriers to accessing these opportunities. This paper critically assesses adult education for these marginalized groups, considering various challenges and intervention programs. Based on an exploratory survey relying on secondary data from articles, journals, newspapers, and magazines, the study identified key issues hindering access, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, corruption, unaffordable costs, individual learner differences, armed conflicts and insecurity, a lack of professional facilitators, and gender discrimination. Furthermore, the study highlighted several intervention programs, such as community-based and mobile learning, incentives and cash transfers, inclusive infrastructure and training, language diversification, awareness campaigns, and technology integration. The paper concludes that marginalized groups have limited access to education and can be better supported through adult and non-formal education initiatives.*

**Keywords:** Disadvantaged, Education, Adult Education, Marginalized groups, Nigeria.

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### Introduction

Education serves as a powerful tool for transformation, effectively mitigating poverty and child labor. Despite being a fundamental human right, there's limited research on its accessibility for diverse learners (Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon 2021). In Nigeria, adult education programs are designed to meet the educational needs of individuals who missed formal schooling or seek continuous learning (Godspower & Ikechi 2025). However, marginalized groups, including women, rural dwellers, people with disabilities, internally displaced persons (IDPs), the elderly, and low-income earners, often struggle to access these opportunities due to various systemic challenges. These barriers persist despite Nigeria's National Policy on Education, which emphasizes the right to education for all (Federal Ministry of Education, 2014).

These marginalized groups, also known as disadvantaged or underrepresented populations in educational settings, face significant social, economic, or cultural barriers that hinder their access to quality education and equitable learning opportunities (Nasife 2023). These learners frequently encounter educational obstacles stemming from factors like poverty, linguistic diversity, or disabilities (Hodgson & McConnell 2019). Identifying these groups is crucial for addressing educational inequalities and promoting inclusivity (Taylor & Francis, 2017). Adult education, often seen as a transformative force in modern pedagogy, has grown significantly in recent years, partly due to global disruptions such as economic downturns and globalization.

While this mode of instruction offers flexibility and accessibility, it also presents a "dichotomy": providing immense opportunities while simultaneously intensifying educational disparities, particularly among disadvantaged learner populations (Ogunode & Mazadu 2022). These learners confront multifaceted challenges that impede their equitable access to quality education in the distance learning landscape.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

For clarity, the following concepts are discussed in this section.

#### **The Concept of Adult Education**

Scholars have defined adult education in various ways. Fasokun (in Wami, Nwafor & Deekor, 2019) described it as being concerned not with preparing people for life, but rather with helping adults live more successfully as useful, acceptable members of their societies, contributing meaningfully to their development. Wanyama (in Wami & Deekor, 2020) asserted that adult education plays a significant role in societal development. It's widely recognized as a powerful tool for eradicating adult illiteracy, reducing poverty, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It provides basic education and training opportunities to adults and out-of-school youths, aged fifteen years and above, who either missed out on formal education in childhood or dropped out before achieving sustainable literacy levels.

Adult education is a broad field covering various areas of human learning. Its core principle is the belief that learning shouldn't be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity (Oghenekohwo, Tonukari & Samuel, 2020). Through adult education, many adults have found new learning paths, made up for lost time, and discovered their potential and skills, achieving things they never thought possible. Oghenekohwo (2017) opined that adult education involves adults engaging in systematic and sustained self-educating activities to gain new knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values. It is any organized educational program designed for adults to acquire skills, upgrade their knowledge, and enhance their standard of living (Oghenekohwo et al., 2022).

Adult education is a lifelong learning process with both general and specific objectives. Bala, Osagie, and Yakubu (2019) averred that adult education is any educational activity that caters to the needs of adults to improve their performance in all areas of adult life, thereby improving their living standard. Alumona (2022) stated that adult education encompasses all education and training activities undertaken by adults, for either professional or personal reasons. Bacchus (2018) posited that adult education is a field tasked with solving socio-economic, cultural, political, and environmental problems. There's a positive association between adult education programs and increased levels of self-esteem, knowledge, and skills, which encourages positive and active engagement in personal development. According to Emeya (2022), adult education is an indispensable instrument for lifelong and life-wide learning, becoming associated with every lifelong learning initiative for adults in the 21st century.

The concept of adult education has garnered numerous definitions due to the broad nature of the discipline and the various contexts in which it has been viewed. Taylor, Jack, and Wami (2022) opined that adult education responds to the educational needs of adults and their societies. Such needs may vary based on individual and community

differences, hence the fluid nature of adult education, as it evolves with changing circumstances of individuals and their societies.

### **The Concept of Marginalized Groups**

Marginalized groups are those excluded from meaningful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination (Young 2000). This definition emphasizes social spheres as a major determinant of marginalization, meaning society determines which persons fall into this category.

According to UNESCO (2017), marginalized groups are those excluded from full participation in society due to their identity, such as ethnicity, gender, disability, economic status, or location. This definition highlights individual identity as a major source of exclusion from mainstream society.

Hooks (2000) describes marginalization as a site of deprivation but also resistance, where individuals are excluded from power structures but can challenge them from the edges. A typical example is Black women in academia in South Africa, who often experience marginalization due to both racial and gender biases.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2016) defined marginalized groups to include communities or individuals systematically denied full access to their rights due to structural inequalities. An example of this category is refugees and asylum seekers, who often face legal, social, and economic marginalization. In 2023, the UNHCR reported over 117 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, many of whom experience significant marginalization.

Adewumi (2012) defined marginalized groups as a segment of the population excluded from access to basic services, political participation, and economic benefits due to systemic inequality. A typical example of this category is the Almajiri children in Northern Nigeria, an estimated 10 million of whom are often excluded from formal education and healthcare systems.

According to Okolie (2003), marginalization is the systemic relegation of individuals or groups to the fringes of society, often through exclusion from power, wealth, and decision-making. He further mentioned that marginalized groups refer to categories of persons denied economic, political, and decision-making rights. An example includes Nigerian women in rural areas, who often lack access to political offices, land ownership, and credit facilities. As of 2022, only 4.7% of seats in Nigeria's House of Representatives were held by women, significantly lower than the global average.

Agbalajobi (2010) sees marginalization as the denial of equal rights and opportunities to specific social groups, usually underpinned by patriarchal, cultural, or economic systems. A marginalized group is therefore considered a group whose rights and privileges are denied by patriarchy, culture, and economic systems. In Nigeria, for instance, persons with disabilities face limited access to education, employment, and political representation. The 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey indicated that 7% of Nigerians aged 5 and above have some form of disability, yet many struggle with access to basic services.

## **Issues Associated with Marginalized Groups**

The section below presents major issues that prevent the marginalized from accessing formal education.

### **Emotional and Psychological Challenges**

Marginalized learners often experience anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem due to constant exposure to stigma, discrimination, and exclusion (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2021). For example, many learners face a higher level of bullying, which affects their attendance and academic performance (Kosciw et al., 2022). A 2020 study in the United States found that 20% of students aged 12-18 reported being bullied at school, with marginalized groups often experiencing higher rates. Similarly, students from conflict zones, such as refugees and internally displaced persons, often suffer from social withdrawal, compromising their cognitive engagement in learning (Dryden-Peterson, 2020). As of early 2024, there were an estimated 3.6 million IDPs in Nigeria, many of whom face significant psychological distress.

### **Cultural Alienation and Identity Conflict**

Cultural dissonance plays a major role in the educational experiences of minority learners. Indigenous learners, for instance, often navigate curricula that dismiss or undermine their cultural histories, languages, and knowledge systems (Battiste, 2019). This leads to internalized inferiority and alienation from academic spaces that fail to affirm their identities (Aronson & Laughter, 2021). Muslim girls in Western contexts frequently report a clash between school policies (e.g., dress codes) and religious practices, leading to absenteeism or disengagement (Halim & Park, 2021). For example, a 2019 report by the Pew Research Center indicated that 49% of French Muslims believe that religion is very important in their lives, which can sometimes lead to conflicts with secular school environments.

### **Disability and Inadequate Support Systems**

Marginalized groups with disabilities face both systemic neglect and personal struggles of invisibility and misunderstanding. Disability is another huge factor that complicates education. Many students with physical, learning, or mental disabilities are in schools that lack the tools or willingness to support them (Kuper et al., 2021). Many educational systems lack the capacity for individualized support or adaptive technologies, placing an undue emotional and cognitive load on learners (Kuper et al., 2021). Moreover, fear of stigma often discourages students from disclosing disabilities, especially in environments where they might be labeled or underestimated (Moriña, 2020). According to the World Health Organization, approximately 15% of the global population experiences some form of disability, yet a significant portion lacks adequate educational support.

### **Language Barriers and Communication Challenges**

Linguistic exclusion presents a significant barrier to education, particularly for migrant and refugee children who often struggle to keep up in systems lacking adequate language acquisition support (Piller, 2021). Beyond comprehension, these students may

find it difficult to express themselves, participate in discussions, or advocate for their academic needs, leading to academic isolation and underachievement.

### **Issues Associated with Adult Education for Marginalized Groups**

Marginalized groups face several challenges in accessing education within society. These issues are discussed below:

#### **Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities**

Many adult education centers in Nigeria lack facilities that support effective learning. A majority of these centers were built without considering the needs of learners with special needs, and those with such facilities are scarce and often not located in rural areas where the demand from marginalized adult learners is highest. Ogunode, Jegede, & Solomon (2021) observed that inadequate infrastructure is a major challenge to educational administration in Nigeria. Most learning centers have insufficient basic and specialized facilities such as laboratories, workshops, clinics, resource centers, virtual learning resources, hyperlinks, and computer networks. This lack of facilities and materials is a significant barrier to the continued education of marginalized groups in Nigeria. Evidence suggests that many academically qualified learners with special needs may not enroll in special or regular schools due to the absence of necessary support services (Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon, 2021). The lack of adequate facilities and support for effective inclusion implies that many learners with special needs, especially those with visual and hearing impairments, may not attend regular neighborhood schools or Nigerian colleges and universities. Data indicate a significant lack of support services in public special and inclusive schools.

#### **Inadequate Funding**

The poor funding of education in Nigeria negatively impacts the development of the educational structure, and adult education centers are no exception. The adult education system is extensive, often combining students with and without special needs in the same learning environment and facilities, thus requiring substantial financial investment for educational resources. Furthermore, resources for adult learners are often expensive. This is corroborated by Ogunode, Jegede, & Solomon (2021), who stated that inadequate funding is a formidable obstacle to the effective administration of educational programs in Nigeria, particularly in areas where marginalized populations reside. Inadequate funding affects the entire Nigerian educational system. The federal, state, and local governments have been reluctant to implement the UNESCO recommendation of allocating 26% of their budgets to education. This failure to implement the recommendation adversely affects educational administration, especially adult education programs. Nwoagba (2013) identified funding as the primary constraint and barrier to the growth of adult education in Nigeria, further noting that coordinating services and providing individual support to adult learners, particularly those with special needs, demands additional financial resources, and inadequate funding hinders professional development. In many cases, adult education program administrators do not receive the necessary funds, leading to deficiencies in infrastructure, equipment, and learning materials for learners. Factors contributing to inadequate educational financing (Ogunode 2020; Ogunode & Madu, 2021) include shortfalls in national revenue, competition from other sectors, corruption, insecurity,

natural disasters, and a lack of political will to implement UNESCO recommendations. The effects of underfunding education in Nigeria include inadequate infrastructural facilities, insufficient professional teachers, shortages of instructional materials, poor quality of education, inadequate capacity development, poor supervision, and strike actions.

### **Corruption**

Ogunode, Jegede Ajape (2021) and Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) observed that institutional corruption is another pervasive problem affecting educational administration in Nigeria, including adult education centers. Corruption has permeated educational institutions, leading to the mismanagement and misappropriation of funds allocated for educational services such as planning, supervision, quality assurance, and procurement of infrastructural facilities by some officials and political officeholders. The high rate of corruption in ministries, departments, and agencies of education hinders the administration of educational services, including special needs programs, in Nigeria. Transparency International reports that 66 percent of the money allocated to education by Nigerian governments is stolen by corrupt officials. According to the report, corruption is widespread in education systems across the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), negatively impacting education access, quality, inclusion, and learning outcomes. This has devastating consequences for national economic growth and the life chances of children, adults, their families, and communities. The report highlighted "resource misallocation, corrupt procurement, exchange of sex for grades, examination malpractices, fake qualifications, teacher absenteeism, and corrupt recruitment practices" as various corruption risks and challenges facing education systems in all countries (Ogunode & Shofoyeke, 2021). These issues significantly plague the education system, extending their detrimental effects to marginalized groups in society.

### **Unaffordable Costs**

Poverty remains one of the greatest threats to high-quality education in any country. Although the National Policy on Education (1981) stipulates a one hundred percent transition rate from primary to secondary schools, Nigeria has yet to achieve this. Even where formal education is technically free in most states, adult education is not, especially for marginalized groups. Additional financial expenses, such as transportation fares to learning centers, create financial barriers for many adult learners. These learners consistently report that these indirect costs hinder their access to education. Furthermore, many citizens argue that adult education seldom leads to paid employment, thus viewing it as less relevant. It is crucial to help them understand that it serves as a foundational step on the educational ladder. This unaffordable cost is a major challenge impeding adult learners' participation in adult education.

### **Individual Differences Amongst Learners**

Individual differences among learners pose a barrier to equal educational opportunity in Nigeria, and marginalized groups are no exception. The current educational system often fails to adequately consider the diverse abilities and aptitudes of individual enrolled pupils. Providing common curricula and equipping centers with adequate instructional materials are insufficient for meeting the educational needs of every adult

in a given society. In essence, subjecting both mentally retarded and "normal" adults to the same system creates a barrier rather than fostering equality of educational opportunity. Similarly, applying the same mainstream teaching pattern to both "normal" and gifted adults is absurd. What is needed is a diversified system that caters to the different aptitudes and abilities of individual pupils.

### **Armed Conflicts and Insecurity**

The devastating effects of insecurity in the form of armed conflicts significantly hinder educational expansion in Nigeria. Thousands of pupils are forced out of conventional schools in conflict-affected states annually, and hundreds of thousands more are displaced by natural disasters. These unforeseen circumstances also impact marginalized adult learners. For instance, the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria has led to attacks on schoolchildren, widespread rape of girls and women, and the systematic destruction of school facilities. Sexual terror is employed as a powerful weapon of war. The forceful kidnapping of over 200 Chibok girls from a school in Borno State gained international attention (Godpower & Ikechi 2015). This, of course, affects adult learners by creating sexual terror and inflicting immense hardship, fear, and insecurity on young girls and women, causing untold damage to their education. Victims of this menace are forcefully recruited as soldiers and often used as human shields during combat. Classrooms, teachers, and pupils are prime targets, leading to fear among learners to attend classes, fear among teachers to teach, and fear among parents and guardians to send their wards to school. Additionally, armed conflicts in Nigeria divert public funds from education to military spending, a disastrous consequence that retards the development of adult education in Nigeria.

### **Inadequate Professional Facilitators**

The shortage of professional facilitators with specialized expertise in adult education, particularly for marginalized groups, also impedes the development of adult education in Nigerian centers. Most teachers providing academic support for adult learners are not professionally trained in this specific field, and many have not received training on how to effectively teach these learners. Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) assert that inadequate professional teachers represent another challenge preventing the effective administration of adult education in Nigeria. The country lacks a sufficient number of professional teachers trained to work in adult education centers, which affects program administration. Teachers are crucial to implementing any teaching program, and their role in administering special needs programs is irreplaceable. Educational administration, in general, is influenced by the availability of qualified professional teachers. Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) and Rufus, Jummai, Suraju & Eucharia (2014) observe that manpower employment and development is a major barrier to teaching adult learners, especially in skill acquisition areas. Vandeh (2013) identified teacher shortages, inadequate instructional materials, insufficient infrastructural facilities, inadequate funding, and poor quality of education as problems facing special education across the country.

### **Gender Discrimination**

Women and girls in Nigeria face several barriers to equal educational opportunity (Terfa 2016), including child marriage, early pregnancy, domestic labor, and human

trafficking. According to Wikipedia Online Press, Nigeria is a source, transit, and destination country for victims of human trafficking, with trafficked Nigerian women and children recruited from rural areas for involuntary domestic servitude and forced commercial sexual exploitation, and boys for forced labor in street vending, domestic servitude, mining, and begging (Bukhari, Tijjani, Hayatu, & Habibu 2024).

In the far North, some Muslim parents are reluctant to send their daughters to school due to cultural and religious reasons. Even in the Southern parts of the country, many parents hesitate to educate their female children, citing old customs and values that perceive female education as unnecessary, believing women are primarily for childbirth and domestic chores. Furthermore, men's perception of educated women as a "threat" in politics and economy has also made it difficult for families to educate their daughters. These discriminations against the education of marginalized girls act as barriers, leading to fewer girls enrolling and many who do often dropping out of school.

The disparity between male and female education is evident in the male monopoly in higher levels of the economy and polity. This explains the common practice of Nigerians educating their sons before considering their daughters. However, there is a reversal of this trend in some states where female pupils significantly outnumber their male counterparts. This discrimination also extends to marginalized women in society, who face similar barriers to enrolling in adult education. It is crucial to sustain this reverse trend, bearing in mind that increased girl education reduces birth rates, which in turn improves the quality of life for many families.

### **Adult Education for Marginalized Groups: Interventions**

Here are some identified interventions for the issues discussed above:

1. *Community-Based and Mobile Learning*: Establishing learning centers within rural and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) communities and deploying mobile teachers would increase accessibility, as most marginalized individuals reside in rural areas where educational centers are often out of reach. For example, in Bauchi State, an NGO-run mobile education unit visits remote villages weekly to offer literacy training under trees and in local markets. Physically challenged individuals with limb problems particularly benefit from this program due to mobility challenges.
2. *Incentives and Cash Transfers*: Conditional incentives such as food items, school supplies, or transport reimbursement can boost enrollment by easing survival burdens. When these basic necessities are met, learning is significantly encouraged. A typical example is in Jigawa State, where the State Agency for Mass Literacy introduced stipends for female learners, resulting in a 45% increase in attendance within six months (UNESCO, 2022).
3. *Inclusive Infrastructure and Training*: The government should mandate and fund the creation of inclusive classrooms, equip facilitators with inclusive teaching methods, and provide adaptive learning materials. There is a need for the continuous training and retraining of adult facilitators to ensure more professional and effective service delivery (Naira Project 2022), benefiting both the learner and the teacher. For instance, Lagos State established an Inclusive Education Unit in 2020 to train adult educators in teaching people with disabilities.



4. *Language Diversification*: Programs should be designed in indigenous languages, with materials adapted to regional dialects and cultural contexts. While challenging, providing these materials in indigenous languages will significantly contribute to success. Adult learning centers should also be established in rural and conflict-affected areas (Disciplines Nigeria, 2023). A typical example is the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC), which has begun piloting literacy programs in Yoruba and Igbo languages in selected states.
5. *Awareness Campaigns*: Mass campaigns via radio, mosques, churches, and community leaders can raise awareness. There is a need to sensitize the populace, especially those who desire education, on the relevance of adult education and how it can improve their lives. Education generally helps individuals acquire meaningful knowledge, skills, training, and attitudes to become independently productive in society. The knowledge gained through sensitization will serve as motivation for individuals. This can be seen in "the Education for All" campaign in Kano State, which uses Hausa-language jingles on local radio to reach over 1 million residents (Insight Spice, 2023).
6. *Technology Integration*: Low-tech solutions such as radio and SMS-based learning can deliver lessons to remote or conflict-affected areas. For example, a USAID project in Northeast Nigeria uses solar-powered radio sets to deliver educational content to adult learners in IDP camps. Radio, mobile phones, and internet platforms can facilitate distance learning, particularly in rural or conflict zones. Programs like the National Mass Literacy Campaign can integrate mobile learning strategies (Wikipedia, 2023). This intervention is particularly impactful in the Northeast, as it considers Nigeria's power challenges and attempts to provide solutions.

### **Suggestions for Making Interventions a Reality**

1. *Community-Based and Mobile Learning*: The government, policymakers, and adult education facilitators must ensure that learners receive the best possible knowledge, skills, and training, regardless of the delivery method. This will enhance the understanding of education.
2. *Grassroots Distribution of Incentives and Cash Transfers*: Teams of facilitators should ensure that incentives like food items, school supplies, or transport reimbursement are adequately distributed to learners, as these provisions primarily aim to ease their survival burden. The provision of physical cash is also encouraged as it will significantly help. A corruption-free committee should be established to ensure enforcement.
3. *Inclusive Infrastructure and Training*: The government should mandate and fund the creation of inclusive classrooms, equip facilitators with inclusive teaching methods, and provide adaptive learning materials. Continuous training and retraining of adult facilitators in a more professional manner are crucial for effective service delivery (Naira Project 2022), benefiting both learners and teachers.
4. *Language Diversification*: The use of indigenous languages in teaching will facilitate a better understanding of the program. It is also advisable that learning materials are provided in regional dialects and cultural contexts. Providing these materials in indigenous languages will significantly contribute to success.

5. *Campaigns through Indigenous Languages:* The sensitization process regarding the relevance of adult education for learners must be conducted in the indigenous languages of the populace. This will significantly aid in understanding the nature and relevance of the programs. Mass campaigns via radio, mosques, churches, and community leaders should be interpreted in native languages.
6. *Provision of Technological Gadgets:* Providing gadgets such as phones and radio sets for learners will go a long way in making this intervention a reality. The erratic nature of power supply in the country may also necessitate the provision of alternate power sources to power these gadgets.

In summary, all the aforementioned interventions can be realized only if the government, policymakers, and stakeholders fulfill their roles and responsibilities. There is a critical need to enact and implement policies that ensure strict compliance and initiation of these interventions

## **Conclusion**

Adult education encompasses any educational program designed for adults and youths, offering flexibility in content and delivery to meet the diverse needs of individuals and their communities. Despite numerous efforts by the Nigerian government, stakeholders, and policymakers to ensure access to quality education, various societal groups continue to face significant barriers. These challenges stem from geographical, economic, political, and health factors, leading to the marginalization of vulnerable populations such as girls, women, rural inhabitants, people with disabilities, internally displaced persons (IDPs), the elderly, and low-income earners. Their limited access to education is further compounded by issues including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, corruption, high costs, individual learning differences, armed conflicts, insecurity, a shortage of qualified teachers, and gender discrimination. In response to these persistent issues, the government, stakeholders, and policymakers have initiated several intervention programs. These include community-based and mobile learning initiatives, incentives and cash transfers, inclusive infrastructure development and training, language diversification, awareness campaigns, and technology integration.

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