REPOSITIONING PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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Abstract
The policy interest in adult education raises issues not only about the extent of participation but also more fundamentally about who reposition participation, who participates and the social construction of inequalities in adult education. However, to judge participation is not a straight forward task as the attendance are highly dependent on how adult education is being understood. Therefore, this paper aimed at repositioning participation in adult education in the contemporary world. The paper began with an introduction which x-rayed who should be involved in repositioning participation in adult education. The paper further looked into how participation in adult education can be repositioned. Based on this premise, the paper concluded that if stakeholders such as the governments, education providers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and social partners can provide adequate finance, human, and material resources, consistent policy, be sincere, and dedicated, then there will be improvement in the rate at which people participate in adult education.

Keywords: Repositioning, Participation, Adult education, Contemporary world

Introduction
        The need to participate in adult education programmes can vary according to societies, regions, groups, individuals, time and circumstances. As a result, due to the fact that the world is in a process of rapid change and structured education alone is not enough to adapt to these changes and developments, well positioned adult education is needed so that individuals can renew, develop, collect and adapt to the world. The world is also facing the effects of an ageing population and social exclusion which continues to be a serious challenge for all our countries. The problem of low-skilled adults whose future looks increasingly marginal across the globe that will concentrate on knowledge-intensive jobs needs to be tackled. Access to high-quality adult learning plays a decisive role in developing better skills and competences that contribute to employability and the overall competitiveness in the world. It is also in the know that

participation in learning brings equally important benefits for adults' social inclusion and personal fulfillment.

Participation generally involves sharing or taking part in something. Applied to adult education, it means enrolment and involvement in an adult education program or class. Jarvis (2016) defines participation in adult education simply as 'the attendance at adult education courses. A survey of available literature however reveals that participation generally and especially in adult education is not as simple as Jarvis's definition. According to Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2017), participation is one of the more thoroughly studied areas in adult education. It is complex, contested and weaves into issues of context, barrier, learning, motivation, enrolment, retention/attrition, ideology and social stratification.

Participation in learning assists people to secure a productive and active role in their native communities and society at large. It can help reduce health costs and the incidence of criminality, for instance, while also helping to reduce poverty (McGivney, 2011; Bliss, 2014). Consequently, one cannot underestimate the significance of learning for personal growth and well-being. Yet, statistics show that only a small proportion of adults participate in learning, with large variations between countries (Comings, 2003; Jarvis, 2016). Even more alarming is the fact that most countries average rate of participation in adult learning has been slowly decreasing since 2005 (Egwu, 2012).

In lieu of the mentioned above, decisive and concerted action is needed to revisit adult education programmes in order to have a reasonable percentage of adult participation in learning by 2030. Consequently, the first challenge that needs to be addressed is to increase participation in adult learning by making learners, providers, stakeholders and policy makers to be aware of the benefits of a high quality, easily accessible and equitable adult learning system. It is on this basis therefore, that this paper looks into how to reposition participation in adult education in the contemporary world.

Who should be involved in Repositioning Participation in Adult Education?

According to Macleod (2015), the primary target groups to reposition participation in adult education are the governments, education providers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and social partners.

Governments

Local governments can execute campaign activities developed at national level or initiate programmes of their own. These may facilitate stakeholders operating at community level to best deliver their activities. It is likely that local governments' capacity to initiate adult learning awareness-raising activities will largely depend on their level of autonomy and access to funding. The positioning they enjoy, however, offers them opportunity to interact directly with the adult populace, beyond the delivery of education services. Local governments represent the closest-to-the citizen public authority and thus have considerable potential capacity to re-direct citizens towards adult learning opportunities. Acting as a gateway to national government policies and funding streams, local governments are also well positioned to communicate and disseminate information to stakeholders within the adult learning community, with the potential of helping the creation of networks for cooperation.

According to Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2017), the major goals of governments should be to: disseminate research and sectoral policy reports, ensure that these research outputs

successfully reach the actors in the field, set-up adult learning objectives and priorities at national level, establish stakeholder cooperation networks, conduct evaluation and quality assurance by targeting education providers in the adult education sector to push for quality development, promote operational policy changes, research the local needs of the adult population, implement state/local awareness-raising strategies, facilitate efforts at civil society level, and provide opportunities for knowledge sharing with other local actors.

Education Providers

These represent a key stakeholder in the process of adult education. They have to be convinced of the need to provide further education in response to current demand. It is important that they base and adapt their educational offers to the needs of learners. They also have to convince adult learners to participate in their programmes in order to accomplish a return on their investments. Moreover, both public and private sector providers of learning and training services bring a wealth of knowledge of direct interaction with learners and potential learners, and should therefore be encouraged to share their experiences in reaching and interacting with other stakeholders. According to Pont (2004) and Rubenson (2011), their goals should be to intensify offer to meet demand and target groups' needs, communicate individual the social benefits of adult learning, form strategic partnerships with other stakeholders to provide quality education, cooperate with businesses and NGOs to provide course developers with feedback regarding current skills demand and possible work experience placements, market educational offer through intermediaries such as national institutes for adult learning etc., and use online tools to advance awareness of and deliver education courses

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

NGOs have the capacity to complement research gaps in the identification of learners' needs and necessary changes or interventions at structural policy level. The groups they seek out to are different in nature and need multiple targeted awareness-raising activities. The remit of involvement of civil society organisations, however, depends on resources obtainable and scope of activities. The goals of NGOs according to Illeris (2014), should be to disseminate the needs of learners they work with on a daily basis, and make them known at policy level through lobbying, campaigning, awareness raising, direct actions and working with the media. Develop and implement campaigns targeting adult learners, provide training and mentoring courses and relevant certificates for adult learning teaching staff with a view to initiate exchange of qualified training and mentoring personnel on local and state levels. Create strategic coalitions with other stakeholders in order to have positive environment on advocacy for adult learning. These coalitions must not necessarily be only in the adult education domain, but should also target associations for active and healthy ageing, media literacy organisations, publishers, etc.

Social Partner

These are considered a key stakeholder group as they interact directly with target groups to educate them on the benefits and importance of adult education. Acting as a gateway to employment and the provision of professional training, social partners provide and/or receive funding and they help disseminate awareness raising tools provided by other stakeholders. Working on a community level, they use face-to-face communications, develop print material, make networking events or develop training for employees. Their major goals according to

Boudard and Rubenson (2015), should be to disseminate tools produced by other stakeholders, interact with target groups to educate them on the benefits and importance of adult education, create networking events, and develop work-based learning and training for employees that will enable employees to learn and develop new skills that can further their professional lives and contribute to the overall success of an organisation. Education providers should be incorporated in the development of training courses to provide best practice and knowledge.

How can Participation in Adult Education be repositioned?

Participation in adult education can be repositioned when professionals strategically engage do the following:

Set Objectives: There should be development of a comprehensive campaign plan. To achieve this, every campaign initiative should begin with a clear plan with clearly pre-defined 'SMART' objectives. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that objectives are always evaluated against their results, and updated to have them 'SMART'. Objectives at all times have to be realistic and achievable, while taking into account the existing situation. It is also pertinent to align goals with wider agenda. While setting up campaign objectives and goals, if possible, they should be linked with goals common to other national stakeholders. Also, develop a corporate identity. A campaign plan should be used to form a specific identity for the promoted programme (e.g. using a slogan or logo) and therefore ensure consistency of dissemination activities and easy recognition on the part of the target group.

Identify Target Groups: Find out who your target groups are. Target groups are differentiated in their attitudes, disposition and approach towards adult learning. This diversity can be seen even within the same demographic or socio-economic groups. It is therefore important to carefully research the specific target group that would be participating in the activity, and make sure that the approach to each group is varied to reflect their needs and to encourage their participation. It is also important to consider the preferences of each target group in terms of information delivery. Only in-depth research can disclose how specific target groups wish to obtain information. Take account of polarity in views. Potential learners are not always disposed to join an educational course or activity. While they can often be convinced through targeted campaigns, sometimes their views are too polarised to change. It is therefore pertinent not to force them into learning. Constant reminders could cause them to further distance themselves from education. Do not only target learners. Whilst developing a campaign, ensure that target groups include disseminators/multipliers, influencers (third party endorsers) as well as adult learners. These groups (such as the media) should be treated as a separate target group, and activities and messages should be customised for them (Hillage & Aston, 2017). Their inclusion will confirm that the campaign reaches a wider audience. Develop activities for marginalised groups. The education needs of groups that are at risk of social exclusion have to be addressed in a different manner than others. While developing an adult learning strategy targeted towards these marginalised groups, the focus should be on bringing them into the fold of mainstream society, before involving them in further education. Policy makers must be involved through the design and development of a programme so as to ensure that they become active stakeholders, rather than passive listeners.

Identify Tools and Channels to Use: Accessible activities must be used. There are activities that encourage adult learners to acquire new skills, such as dance and cooking. These activities can be used as a learning experience or as a means to 'hook' learners into future activities. Also, encourage peer to peer learning that will provide learners with the enthusiasm to complete the course so as to become teachers and hence receive compensation. Furthermore, it is important to provide stakeholders who are developing programmes and campaigns with more than just other examples of best practice. Guidance needs to be more structured, specific, and process-oriented in the form of operational tools to advance, implement and evaluate campaign programmes. These include communication plan procedures, research tools, campaign thoughts, budgeting tutorials and other operational tools. Show real learning situations. While promoting an activity, it is useful to show potential learners an actual learning situation, so they can understand the type of experience they would have should they return to learning. This can be very important to 'sell' formal education; often, potential learners are disinclined to re-enter education due to the negative associations they have with education in a classroom setting. Also, allow sampling of activities. During the development of an activity, build in processes that allow target audience to 'sample' the activity, try participating, and if they desire, continue. If they decline continuity, the activity should remain open to them for future participation. By knowing up front that they can leave should the activity not be suitable, potential learners are further encouraged to try the activity, since they have nothing to lose.

There must be usage of intergenerational learning. Learning situations which encourage parents to interact with their children can be successful, as parents are more likely to be engaged when they are helping their children to learn. Often, parents do not have an interest in active learning, and will participate in activities due to the fact that those of their children require their involvement. However, this should be seen as a learning end to itself. Even if parents are not participating in adult learning, their 'shared learning' with their children should be encouraged. This brings them into the fold of learning (in any form), and could act as a catalyst to future education activities. The use of online tools is important as the internet is a primary information source for today's society. Online tools increase the geographical scope of an activity and thereby raise the number of participants. They also show the versatility of an activity and facilitate interaction between learners, which eventually supports the sustainability of the activity. However, the development and implementation of an online media campaign needs the same time and human resource investment as a campaign, using regular media. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that any online campaign is established with a long term view, and that adequate resources are dedicated to its execution.

As you are developing activities and promotional campaigns, aim to involve education professionals from the field of adult education. They have already worked with the target audience and are familiar with their needs and requirements, and therefore more likely to develop activities that would best suit them. However, stakeholders should not simply be engaged as executing actors of a campaign, but should be permitted to act as active advocates of the cause. This helps them make their target groups independent of the campaign, thereby favouring more sustainability of efforts undertaken.

In the publicity of adult education, it is important to use role models who are appealing to learners. Similarly, by using actual learners as role models, the campaign becomes more accessible and real for potential learners. This is specifically appropriate if the potential learners are from varied backgrounds: listening to those similar to themselves share their positive

experience, they could be encouraged to emulate the role models. Also, use teachers to promote adult education in libraries, community centres, etc. Local level communication campaigns should leverage the potential influence played by teachers in promoting learning opportunities. Empowering teachers to directly reach out to learners and act as ambassadors in community organisations, libraries and cultural centres gives credibility to learning programmes and first-hand opportunity for them to know how the educational offer should be tailored to the real needs of learners.

Identify Sources of Funding: In addition to traditional sources of funding such as the governments, organisations should try to solicit sponsorships from other sector specific organisations with a vested interest in educating adults in their particular fields. If the sponsors are sure of the value in investing, they will also want to highlight their participation, thereby assuring more promotion for the activity. Also, pool resources to reduce costs. The pooling of resources by partner organisations optimises campaign and programme outcomes, not only in terms of promotion and awareness raising of each other, but also in terms of reduced costs, eluding the repetition of efforts, and reducing the spread of disjointed initiatives with limited potential of impact.

Develop Campaign Messages: Aim to build the confidence of learners. By developing campaigns that aim to build the target group's confidence in their ability to learn, it sends the message that society has good intentions of including them in all social aspects, and therefore increases their dignity and confidence. It is also important to encourage learners to stay in learning by developing activities that will encourage a learner's educational journey.
It is well known that adult learning is multifaceted and can take place in different forms, in terms of course content, structure, and format. Emphasis should be on communicating to potential learners the variety of options available to them. They should be sensitized on the fact that adult education opportunities are available in different formats and options, depending on lifestyle and time.

Develop Campaign: Create evidence-based strategies: Any campaign strategy or programme should be based on evidence, and should address a specific need of the target audience. This requires upfront research and proper understanding of the environment and its target groups. Ensure that the campaign has a single visual identity and centralised plan for the rollout, but assign responsibility for implementation to state/local level according to a decentralised structure. The use of such approach will allow enough flexibility to address local level challenges and adapt the delivery of promotional tools to each specific context, whilst ensuring national consistency. Once learners have decided that they want to participate in a programme, it is important to ensure that they provide a commitment to the completion of the activity. A time commitment ensures that the programme can bring about the expected learning outcome, and be of benefit to learners. Always reward achievements. The benefits of rewarding learners' achievements through prizes go beyond providing incentives to potential learners to re-enter education. It also highlights to policy makers the progress made in the field of adult education, and underlines future steps to be taken, where their support would be needed. It is important to provide an immediate call to action within a programme or campaign that has a tangible benefit to the potential participant. This call to action should be supported by advice on what the participant stands to gain, including if

possible after the programme has closed. Potential learners may be discouraged if they do not have knowledge of what their options are.

Promote Campaign: Do not limit innovation to only the activities themselves: There is an emphasis put on developing innovative new interventions to get potential learners involved in education. However, this search for innovation should not be restricted only to the initiatives. If an activity is promoted in an innovative way, it will also ensure uptake. This approach helps reduce the possibility of adult learning becoming rhetorical and abstract. Nevertheless, adult learning often leads to benefits such as heightened confidence levels of learners and improved social integration. It is important to measure the progress of learners' soft skills through detailed assessment questionnaires, as this helps in the development of future programmes that allow for all round learning. Highlighting these benefits could also entice adult learners who may be interested in a non-formal environment in which they could develop their soft skills. Involve learners themselves in promotional activities. Campaigns that involve existing learners in promotional activities would allow potential learners to get an idea directly as to what the learning experience is like. In addition, when potential learners share firsthand of what their learning experience is, the activity becomes more accessible for them. There should be lasting relationships with the media. Cultivating lasting relationships with media would benefit successful advocacy on adult learning issues. This would require learning what the journalist covers, communicating to them the value of the pitch, and providing necessary materials when appropriate, over a lengthy period of time. Media coverage is one of the best ways to gain the attention of decision makers, and can also be used to publicise local level activities.

Monitor and Evaluate Campaign: National research must be monitored. Monitoring existing national research enables two activities: First, it helps organisations identify existing needs of the population and develop activities to target them, without having to spend any resources in conducting primary research; and secondly, it permits organisations to identify gaps and commission further research as required.

Before launching a campaign strategy or programme, it is important to identify the right tools, channels and messaging. In order to ensure that they are optimal for the target audience, it is necessary to pre-test and adapt them according to feedback. Moreover, if permissible by logistical and budgetary constraints, before the full roll-out of an activity, it should be piloted amongst a smaller group of the target audience. The use of consultations with relevant stakeholders can ensure that divergences in expectations are minimised, the programme answers the needs and preferences of target groups, and any aspects of the programme that do not work can be amended before it is launched. Support external evaluation with internal monitoring. This allows for the identification of emerging best practice as well as the targeting of specific recommendations to actors in charge of implementing the programme in its participating regions.

Conclusion

This paper has established that participation in adult education can only be repositioned if the system provides knowledge and skills corresponding to the needs of potential users, or demands of an individual, the labour market, or the broader community. Also, it presented how awareness can be raised on adult education and explores how to make adult education more popular and more accessible for target groups. Furthermore, it is established in the paper that all

stakeholders in adult education should adopt the proposed approaches to reposition participation in adult education for future activities and to advocate for adult education that is of high quality, attractive, and within reach of all citizens.

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