ADULT EDUCATION: AN INDISPENSABLE REMEDY FOR REDUCTION OF VOTER APATHY IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

This paper focuses on adult education as a remedy for reduction of voter apathy in Anambra State. Adult education is a lifelong process geared towards continuing development of people and the society at large. It is all education activities or programmes designed to equip individuals with veritable skills, capabilities, competencies, values and knowledge required to be informed and productive in life. This paper starts with an introduction and discusses certain concepts as well as programmes of adult education which could be used to reduce voter apathy such as civic education/ voter education, political education and pre-election voter awareness campaigns. Futhermore, it discusses the way forward and conclusions.

Keywords: Adult education, voter apathy

Introduction

Adult education is seen as any activity for adults designed to bring about learning. It implies all instructional related activities provided to assist adults in obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment, parenting and improved qualities of life. Adult education brings a new hope for those that have not gotten the opportunities to enhance their educational skills during the school years to do so. Individuals through adult education are able to acquire educational skills that will help them to improve on a daily basis. Through adult education programmes, different people have hope of participating in various tasks and activities.

Adult education encompasses activities and programmes organized to meet the needs and interests of people out-of-school whose intention is no longer to go to school (Organisation for World Economic Cooperation, 2018). In general, adult education allows individuals to improve their skills, knowledge, technical or professional competencies. It is education that gets one prepared for employment and is also provided during employment (Obidiegwu, 2011). Adult education is education specifically targeting individuals who are regarded as adults by the society to which they belong to improve their technical or professional qualifications, further develop their abilities ,enrich their knowledge ,skills and competencies in a new field or to refresh or update their knowledge in a particular field (UNESCO,2013). Adult education in this study implies all education activities/ programmes designed to sensitise voters on how to reduce voter apathy in order to enhance voter turnout which will help to elect readers to build better cities, states and countries. It is all actions and activities geared towards sensitisation of voters to increase their participation in elections to reduce voter apathy. Voter apathy is a choice that individuals make to absent themselves from the voting process due to lack of interest . Voter apathy leads to various consequences such as low voter turnout and high proportion of unused ballots .Thus, it is very imperative to reduce voter apathy in every country/state, especially in Anambra State so as to make the result of an election credible.

Reduction of voter apathy is of great importance because it increases voter turnout in elections. Voter turnout is a measure of civic participation that people see as a best gauge for measuring credible elections. For any electoral process, it is the participation rate of a given election. This can refer to the percentage of registered voters, eligible voters or all voting-age people. The advantage of voter participation cannot be overemphasized because of its immense benefit to electoral process. Thus, there are numerous programmes to promote voter turnout, which will determine the credibility of an election. The programmes of adult education which could be used to reduce voter apathy to ensure large voter turnout in elections are as follows: Civic education/voter education, political education and pre-election voter awareness campaigns. This paper will be discussed under the following subheadings: What is adult education , voter apathy in Anambra State .

What is Adult Education?

Adult education implies a lifelong process geared towards continuous development of people and the society at large. It covers different aspects of life and areas such as administration as well as dimensions of sustainable development which include political, economic, social and environmental dimensions, among others. It covers all areas of maturity for continuous human development. Adult education is the systematic process of teaching and learning by which individuals acquire new values, attitudes, knowledge, skills, competencies and disciplines. It is the practice of teaching and educating adults. It takes place in the work place, community colleges, high schools, colleges and universities, libraries and lifelong learning centres. According to the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (2010), adult education is any organized learning activity for people considered to be adults by the society. The criterion /criteria for the determination of the adulthood may be the constitution, social responsibility, physical maturity, economic/social status or any other one. Similarly, Oyebamiji and Hassan(2012) defined adult education as all forms of educative experiences needed by men and women according to their varying interests and requirements and their different

levels of comprehension and ability and in their changing roles and responsibilities throughout life.

Adult education is the study of training and education of people out of school. It includes vocational training, general education, and even formal, non-formal and informal education. In this paper, adult education is seen as the solution to voter apathy in Anambra State. It involves all programmes designed to sensitize eligible voters on the need to participate in an election so as to lead to more representative government, dividends of democracy and political development.

Voter Apathy in Anambra State

Voter apathy is a phenomenon wherein individuals who have the right to vote in political elections choose not to do so for various reasons. It is a choice that individuals make to absent themselves from the voting process due to lack of interest in public elections. According to Cloud as cited in Aliyu, Mohammed and Bello (2020), voter apathy occurs when eligible voters do not vote in public elections. Similarly, Ogunbiyi cited in Aliyu, Mohammed and Bello (2020) noted that voter apathy is the insensitivity of the people towards participation in electoral processes. It is a decline in participation of citizens in elections. Voter apathy is a situation when the eligible voters are unwilling to participate in elections. It has been with Nigeria since the introduction of electoral principles in 1992 but got worse when Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999. For instance, in Anambra State, the turnouts were 39% in 2015 and 32.59% in 2019 while the difference in voters' turnout is 6.41% from 2015-2019 (Okafor, Odigbo & Okeke, 2022). There is need for reduction of voter apathy, especially in Anambra State. This is to increase voter turnout in an election. Voter apathy has numerous effects. One side effect of voter apathy can be low voter turnout in an election if voting is non-compulsory. In countries, or areas with compulsory elections, voter apathy may manifest itself in the form of a high proportion of unused ballots. It is very difficult for the citizens' preferences to be represented if they fail to participate in a democratic process such as voting. Thus, this paper focuses on adult education as a remedy for abating voter

apathy through education programmes such as civic education/ voter education, political education and pre-election voter awareness campaigns.

Civic Education/Voter Education

Civic education aims at enhancing civic skills and democratic values among citizens of a country to prepare them to become law-abiding citizens and to have knowledge of the time for voting, place of voting, information regarding the electoral process and other requirements for an eligible voter (NCEP Programme Document cited in Finkel, 2003b). Civic education is a crucial component of adult education that prepares citizens to discharge their responsibilities with the necessary knowledge and skills. Civic education is very important in every election to ensure that all eligible voters understand their rights, political responsibilities and how and where to vote. Voters must understand their rights and responsibilities and must be knowledgeable and well informed to cast ballots that are legally valid and to participate meaningfully in the voting process.

Civic education programmes involve engagement of civic education service providers by organizing workshops, lectures, plays and puppet shows and community meetings (Finkel, 2003). These activities aim at enhancing civic skills and democratic values among citizens of a country to prepare them to become law abiding citizens and to create awareness on voting (Finkel, 2003). Civic education equips citizens with civic skills and dispositions that will help them to be responsible socially and politically.

In Uganda, civic education which entails voter education is the responsibility of every citizen. The National Initiation for Civic Education was launched in Uganda to strengthen civic education across the country. It is through civic education/voter education programmes that the electorates learn about voters' eligibility and registration, rules that govern elections, the voting process, complaint mechanisms, access for persons with disabilities and other important information that will help to prepare the electorates to participate meaningfully in the elections(Walusansa, 2020).

In 2002, the United Nations Development Programme coordinated a comprehensive voter education campaign in Kenya which helped to prevent post-election violence. This influenced the behaviour of individuals. The Citizens Coalition for Electoral Democracy campaigns in Uganda in 2015 and 2016, contributed to voter turn-out, which increased from 58% in 2015 to 67.6% in 2016. The aim of the campaign was to boost citizens' participation in the electoral process. Besides reducing voter apathy, civic education/voter education programmes help in awakening the civic consciousness of vulnerable groups in an election. Presently, election observation reports have indicated that voting patterns, especially in rural areas, are still influenced by voters receiving money or other household items such as sugar, soap and salt, among others. In order to reverse such trends, voter education programmes help to change the mindset of the voters in order to vote based on issues rather than material gains from respective candidates. Voter education programmes help to minimize the number of invalid votes and election related conflicts. Voter apathy could be worse without voter education (Common Wealth Youth Programme, 2020).

Voter education/civic education describes the propagation of information, materials and programmes intended to inform voters about the particulars and procedures of the voting process for an election. It involves providing information on who is eligible to vote, where and how to register, how electorates can check the voter lists to ensure they have been duly included, what type of elections are being held, where, when and how to vote, who the candidates are, and how to file complaints (Ezechinyere, 2014) . It is all forms of information or communication whose purpose is to educate voters on their rights and responsibilities in the electoral process. Voter education means training and education programmes designed for citizens in a manner that is free from political partisanship to enable them to gain the necessary information to engage in informed participation in order to enable them understand the purpose and importance of election to discharge their responsibilities and participate in the electoral process.

The goal of voter education is to make information available to all constituents. Voter education campaigns should seek to achieve universal coverage of the

electorate. To do this effectively, it requires reaching out to disadvantaged groups as well as mainstream voters. Minority groups, internally displaced persons and other marginalized segments of society should be targeted. Young adults eligible to vote for the first time may need special messages explaining how to register and cast a ballot. Voter education should also include publicity encouraging people to vote. Voter education is vital to the integrity of elections. Through voter education, millions of eligible voters will have the opportunity to get relevant information on what they need to know about an election and their rights and responsibilities in the electoral process. A major challenge of every election is the problem of low voter turnout on election day. In Nigeria, there were 84,004,084 registered voters but the voter turnout was just 49.78% less than half of the eligible voters for the 2019 general elections (Obialo, 2022). Voter education helps voters to receive awareness of the importance of voting and why they need to participate in the elections. Voters are provided with relevant information on adherence to the guidelines for voting in order to avoid disenfranchisement. The voters are instructed to go to the specific polling units where their names appeared on the voters register. Voter education creates awareness on the entire electoral process.

It is the role of voter education to educate voters on how to conduct themselves to prevent the occurrence of electoral offences. Through voter education, the voters will get to know what constitutes electoral offenses and their penalties. Voters receive relevant guidelines on how to transfer from one registration centre to another. Voters learn how to apply for the transfer and what documents to attach alongside the application.

Political Education

Political education is defined as knowledge and understanding of political issues, which will enable people to perform their roles as citizens effectively (Denver & Hands cited in Onuigbo, Eme & Asadu, 2018). It is the basic facts that constitute a necessary condition for comprehending the contents of public debate. Political education is a means of informing the citizens of a given country to cultivate the virtues, knowledge and skills necessary for political participation. It covers both

formal education offered in school such as civic education, political science and non-formal education offered by the national orientation agency, civil society organizations, independent national electoral commission, among others. It is meant to educate the masses on how to carry out their roles as citizens.

Political education is an aspect of adult education which is directed to foster individual abilities to participate actively in public elections. It is an effort to involve citizens in a community to create a culture of participation. Political education gives voters awareness to use their vote (Cohen & Kahne, 2012). Political education contributes to the building of political knowledge, character and preference of citizens. It contributes to building of citizens' skills, intellectual and participatory skills. Intellectual skill is a critical thinking skill while participatory skill includes the ability to interact, monitor public issues and influence public policy. By educating voters and building their political knowledge or skills through political education, they will participate meaningfully in elections and turnout will increase, thereby providing, sustaining and institutionalizing a culture of credible elections and popular participation in governance. Political education reduces the costs and increases the benefit of voting in many ways. It increases the cognitive skills that facilitate learning about politics. The better education voters receive the more qualification from electoral participation (Onuigbo, Eme & Asadu, 2018).

Pre-Election Voter Awareness Campaigns

This is aimed at sensitizing voters on the importance of participating in the electoral process as a way to ensure a responsive, accountable and democratically elected government. A free and fair vote is the fundamental tool through which citizens can express their political preferences and developmental wishes in a democracy. Pre-election voter awareness campaigns are designed to sensitize people on elections; the significance of their involvement as electors or as nominees in elections; several participation modes; the process for eligibility for the vote and for casting their votes actually; how to determine the candidate's polling value. Increasing political understanding allows citizens to make intelligent choices and offers the framework for further public engagement. To assist nominees as well as political parties to

express the felt desires of constituencies and communities, while leading to more informed forums and plans. It leads to greater political transparency, responsibility, integrity and public faith in governance (Priyanka, Ranjana & Mukesh, 2020). A pre-election voter awareness campaign is aimed at making people aware of the importance of their participation in the electoral processes either as voters or candidates, the modes of participation, the procedure to become eligible for voting and to actually cast their vote, the ways to assess the poll-worthiness of the candidate (PRIA, 2009).

The cardinal goal of pre-election voter awareness campaign is to create an environment for free and fair elections and to encourage the participation of marginalized groups such as women, the minorities, special ethnic communities and the poor. This form of campaign was championed in the states in India in 2006 by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia and its partners. It was a success because substantial increase in the overall participation of voters was reported. Similarly, awareness campaigns have been undertaken in other countries such as the Republic of Georgia, where the main focus was on increasing citizens' understanding of electoral standards and procedures, and on promoting active participation of voters (PRIA, 2009).

The Way Forward

The following will help to reduce voter apathy:

1. The election umpire such as INEC in Nigeria should adhere to the existing guidelines so as to encourage voters to participate in election.
2. National Orientation Agency in collaboration with community leaders and Churches should always sensitise voters on the need to vote in an election.
3. Voter education should be conducted in the rural areas in Nigeria using different languages and dialects.

Conclusion

Adult education is defined as all programmes / activities designed to equip individuals with veritable skills, capabilities and competencies required for continuous adjustment in life. In this study, it is education designed for individuals to sensitise them on the need to participate in an election in order to elect competent leaders to ensure good governance. It involves all education activities or programmes designed to educate voters on effective participation in an election so as to reduce voter apathy. As discussed in this paper, adult education pogrammes if well-planned and implemented could be used to reduce voter apathy in Nigeria.

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