

AN INVESTIGATION INTO STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMMES: The Case of Ghana

Ernest AMPADU
Faculty of Education
Sawyers 201
Anglia Ruskin University
Chelmsford, Essex
CM1 1SQ, UNITED KINGDOM

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this was to examine students' attitude toward adult education programmes in Ghana as well as the challenges facing adult education students. The study employed a mixed method approach using a semi-structured questionnaire and interviews as means of data collection.

The study revealed that, the participants were aware of the importance adult education programmes for both individual and national development and this was reflected in their attitudes towards such programmes. Despite these positive attitudes, the participants could not hide their grievances regarding high cost for the programme as well as the huge travel cost and time. The results strongly support the need for the government and adult education authorities to be more pro-active in providing adult education programmes, financial support and scholarship for students to motivate more people to enroll in such programmes for national development.

Keywords: Attitudes, adult education, development.

INTRODUCTION

The greatest treasure and asset of a nation are its educational institutions. They make or mar the destiny of a nation. The strength of a nation is built on human resources developed by its educational institutions which train the brains, provide skills and open a new world of opportunities and possibilities to the nation (Ullah Khan, 2005). Education is considered as one of the most important tools for national development and in view of this governments are increasingly concerned with raising levels of human capital, chiefly through education and training, which is seen as more critical in fuelling economic growth and knowledge creation (OECD, 2007). "The potential for individuals and countries to benefit from this emerging knowledge economy depends largely on their education, skills, talents and abilities, that is, their human capital" (OECD, 2007:1)

According to Fagerlind and Saha (1989) investments in education have traditionally been justified by optimistic assumption that educated population contributes to the socio-economic development of the society as a whole. Mwakawago (1971) have also argued that, the individual's ability to attend adult education programme does not only lead to improvement in the individual adult's professional skills and knowledge base but will rather go a long way to improve the well-being of his/her family and the nation as a whole.

According to Appleton (2001), the relationship between education and development can be understood when we measure the returns that individuals and the nation as a whole derive from education. He found out that high living standards and poverty reduction is influenced by education. That is to say when people are educated they turn to enjoy a high standard of living and vice versa.

Schulter (1963) supported this idea and stated that:

The economic value of education and training rests on the proposition that people enhance their capabilities as producers and consumers by investing in themselves and that school and training are the largest investment in human capital.... there are long standing puzzles about economic growth, changes in the structure of wages and salaries, and changes in personal distribution of income that can be substantially resolved by taking account of investment in human capital (pp. 10-11).

In addition to this, McCann (1998) further argued that, it has now become necessary for countries to adopt strategies in helping its citizenry to develop their potential skills so as to be able to fit into the ever changing world coupled with competition. In arguing his case for the need for human resource development, McCann (1998) argued that, in recent years, we have been witnessing the early turbulent days of a revolution as significant as any other in human society, and knowledge has become the key asset as opposed to land labor and capital the asset of industrial age.

Despite the significant importance of adult education and education in general for national development, financial constraints continue to occupy one of the top positions on the list of challenges facing adult education programmes (Filla, 1996). According to Filla (1996) for people with low income levels, the financial part of the programme is most significant when considering taking up adult education programmes. Cross (1981), also identified dispositional barriers such as attitudes and perception toward the program as another factor affecting adult education programs.

However, Tuijiman and Boudard (2001) have also argued that, when people believe that the learning activity would benefit them the turn to have a positive attitude towards it and vice versa.

METHODOLOGY

Statement of the Problem

Though the government of Ghana have put in place adequate measure to ensure that those who did not had the chance of going through normal education system will do so through the adult education programmes which has been initiated throughout the country.

These programmes are meant for improving the well-being of the people but adult illiteracy still remains a problem in Ghana especially in the rural communities (UNESCO, 2007). Though report from (UNESCO, 2007) shows that the adult literacy rate stood at 58% in 2007, which is an improvement on the 1989 figure of 40%, however, very little is known about the kind of attitudes that adult education students have towards the programme.

Similarly Smith (2001) argued that, despite the importance of such programmes, there is the need to also look at the kind of attitudes that students' have toward such programmes. The present study is therefore designed to answer the following questions:

- What are adult education students' attitudes toward adult education programs in Ghana?
- What are the reasons why people participate in adult education programs?
- What are students' views of the impact of adult education programmes on national development?
- Significance of the Study

The present study is significant in the following ways: Up to date no study has specifically answered the research questions raised in this present study especially in the Ghanaian context. Also the findings of the

study will provide useful information for educational planners, policy makers and administrators especially the Ministry of Education (MoE) who wish to identify areas where additional support and materials are needed to improve the quality of education with much emphasis on adult education programmes for national development. In addition to this, this study will be very useful to the individual citizenry who aims at finding an alternative means of developing their skills without necessarily enrolling in the normal education system. It will also bring to light some of the strategies of improving adult education programmes and also make them attractive and similar to the normal school system.

Research Design

The present study can be described as a employed a mixed method case study as it employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods in answering the research questions raised (Creswell 2003). Similar to the ideas of Creswell (2003), the rationale for a mixed method design in study was to improve the validity and reliability of the study so that people will trust the results. The strategy used in the data collection and analysis was a case study approach. Case study represents a systematic inquiry into a single case to shed light on a phenomena by studying in-depth to understand the complex relationship that exist among the participants (Depoy and Gitlin, 1998; Bryman, 2004).

Population and Sampling Procedure

The target population for this study was all adult education programme students in Ghana. The sampling procedure for this study was in three stages. Firstly, two adult education centres was selected randomly from a list of adult education centres in Ghana. At the second stage a sample of thirty students of adult education programmes that is fifteen from each of the selected centres was selected through the use of the snow ball sampling technique. This is a type of non-probability sampling technique where by the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the study and use these people to reach other peoples (Bryman, 2004). At the third stage five adult education students were purposefully selected for in-depth interviews.

Instruments

Based on the objectives of the study two main instruments were employed in data collection process. Firstly, a semi-structured questionnaire was administered to the selected adult education students to understand their attitudes towards adult education programs and their opinions about the role of adult education programmes in national development. The questionnaire had 20 items. The first six items was used to elicit the participants' background information. The next four questions asked the participants the about the types programmes that they are enrolled as well as motivation and the challenges the face. The last 10 questions were used to elicit information about the participants' attitude toward adult education programmes. The study instrument was validated using a pilot study of some selected adult education students and friends who were interviewed to know whether they have similar understanding of the questions in the questionnaire. Results of the pilot study were used to modify the questionnaire after which content, construct as well as face validity of the questionnaire was made. The questionnaire was then administered to the selected students to know the views on the role of adult education in national development, their attitude towards adult education programmes and some of the factors affecting adult education in Ghana.

To complement the quantitative data from the questionnaire, a semi-structured interview was administered to the five selected students to gather more in-depth information. For the purpose of consistency and uniformity, the researcher used an interview protocol with 10 questions, and since most of the questions in the questionnaire were structured, most of the questions for the interview protocol were drawn from the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

All the copies of the questionnaires were examined to check accuracy and completeness. The schedules was numbered serially, edited, coded and fed into the computer. The data obtained was analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were depicted using absolute numbers, simple percentage and cross tab. The interview conducted was transcribed to come out with common ideas after which it will be analyzed using interpretive analysis procedure.

RESULTS

Background Data of Participants

The results from the study showed that of the thirty students who took part in the study, 20 (66.7%) of the participants are between the age range 35-60years while 10 (33.3%) of them were between the age of 20 – 34 years. Though the results show that more adults are taking part in this kind of adult education programme as compared to their colleagues' young people, however, it can be argued that, the days when adult education was seen as education for the elderly is fading out. The participants of the study were taking different diploma courses from in business studies, basic education and management studies. The results from the study shows that majority of the students who took part in the study do have some secondary education. 21 (70%) of the respondents had secondary education while 9 (30%) have some diploma in a different field of study and they are interested in taking other diploma program in a different field.

In all approximately 15 (50%) of the respondents were trained teachers who hold a teacher's certificate and wants to upgrade their qualification as well as acquiring more knowledge.

Contrary to the policy document of using the adult education programmes to help those who were not able to go through the 'normal' school system to acquire knowledge, the results shows that majority of the participants have had some level of formal education and were participating in these programmes to acquire some new knowledge and also upgrade themselves.

This calls for the need to have a second look at the policy document for a possible change of name of such programmes to reflect actual situation on the ground since most of the programmes were diploma and degree programmes, with few certificate programmes but the policy document consider such programmes as helping people to gain some basic literacy knowledge and skills.

Students' Attitude toward Adult Education Programmes

The kind of attitudes and perception that students have toward a programme plays a very crucial role in assessing or evaluating the impact of the program and the effectiveness of the program (Smith 2001). As a way of eliciting information to answer research question one students were asked to rate their attitude to ten items. The first five items looked at the importance of adult education to individual development and the last five looks at the importance of adult education to national development. The table 1 below shows the responses from students.

Table 1
 Students' Attitude toward Adult Education Programmes

Statement	No.& Percentage of favorable Attitude	No.& Percentage of unfavorable Attitude
It is waste of time to attend adult education programmes	0 (0%)	30 (100%)
Adult education should be organized for all people who want to upgrade themselves or gain new knowledge.	28 (93.3%)	2 (6.7%)
Adult education programmes are meant for those in the urban communities who want to take white color jobs.	2 (6.7%)	28 (93.3%)
All people both young and old should be encouraged to take advantage of the numerous adult education programmes in the country to develop them selves	21 (70%)	9 (30%)
No matter where stationed people Should take advantage of adult education programme to upgrade their knowledge	25 (83.3%)	5 (17.7%)
Adult education programme is an important tool for national development	30 (100%)	0 (0%)
The best way to improve the quality a nation's human resource is through education.	26 (86.7%)	4 (13.3%)
Adult education can be used to reduce the high incidence of unemployment and social exclusion.	20 (66.7%)	10 (33.3%)
Adult education should be used as an alternative way of developing the quality of a country's human resources rather than concentrating only on the normal school system.	20 (66.7%)	10 (33.3%)
Adult education programmes should be included in the school curriculum	18 (60%)	12 (40%)

As a means of measuring the kind of attitude that adult education students have toward adult education programmes, students were asked to rate their levels of agreement to ten questions (items) by stating either SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, A=Agree or SA=Strongly Agree. In analyzing the data from the students' questionnaire the responses were categorized into two that is favorable attitude (agree and strongly agree) and unfavorable attitude (disagree and strongly disagree).

An encouraging finding from this study was that an over whelming majority of the respondents expressed positive attitudes toward adult education programs and that most of the students do acknowledge the importance of adult education programmes for the individual development as well as the total development of the nation as a whole.

Table 1 show that all the respondents were in disagreement that adult education is a waste of time. In addition to this approximately 93.3% of the respondents indicated that adult education should be organized for all people who want to upgrade themselves and also 93.3% of the respondents indicated that adult education are not meant for brilliant people.

This means majority of students were aware of the fact that adult education is very important for individual development and acquisition of new knowledge.

In addition to this, majority of the respondents did acknowledged the importance of adult education for national development and similar to the ideas of Cross (1981), Tuijiman and Boudard (2001) it was clear that among the respondents the decision to take an adult education program was based on their believe that, the learning activity would benefit them directly or indirectly.

Also Schulter (1963), Mwakawago (1971) Appleton (2001) and OCED (2007) indicated that the relationship between education and development can be understood when we measure the returns that individuals and the nation as a whole derive from education. The positive attitudes towards adult education programmes among the respondents support this assertion that education can lead to individual and national development which will go a long way to empower the people to be self-reliant and productive.

Though it was clear from the above discussion that majority of the respondents do have a positive attitude toward adult education programme but they did not hide their concerns when they were asked to indicate some of the challenges that they face in taking part in adult education programme.

Among other things, the respondents cited high cost of the programmes, lack of job opportunities for adult education graduates and the relevance of such programmes as some of the challenges facing them.

Reasons for attending adult education programmes

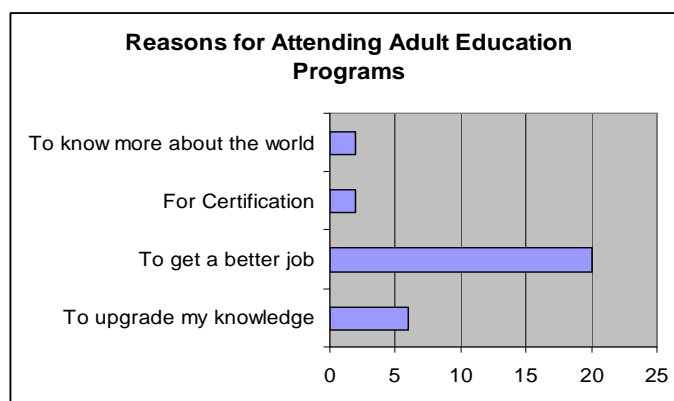


Figure 1
 Reasons for Attending Adult Education Programs

Students ability to participate in adult education programmes is as important as organizing the program itself. Students' participation in any programme including adult education programme is affected negatively or positively by many factors. From the figure above, it can be seen that 20 (66.7%) of the respondents were of the view that they are attending the adult education programme so as to get a better job. 6 (20%) indicated that they were motivated to attend the programme because they want to upgrade their knowledge. Only 2 (6.7%) of the respondents indicated that they are attending the programme for certification and to know more about the world. As indicated by Tuijiman and Boudard (2001) the key decision in taken any course and for that matter adult education course or programme relies mostly on the kind of benefit that the individual believe can bring to him or her.

People having realized the importance of education in getting or finding a better job majority of the respondents (67%) indicated that they are doing the programme so that they can get a better job in future.

The role of adult education programmes in national development?

Vivian *You know things are hard now and without qualification you will not be able to make end meet. You need to have a high qualification to get a better job to keep things moving. Hmm I just have to do my best and finish with this program so as to get a better job and a better pay.*

You know no nation can grow without education. It is good to have an educated population who can make sound judgment and take good decision for national development. To me I think adult education is an important tool for national development and the government should invest more money in it.

Stephen *Oh I think you know how the economy has become very hard these days. Man has to find some certificate and then go to the job market to see what he can get from there.*

Yes, there is a direct relationship between the quality of human resources and the level of productivity. If we have more educated people then there is the likelihood that we will be having high level of productivity.

Peter *I am a teacher and you know the pay is not good. I am trying to do this diploma in commerce program and see if I can get some bank to work. I learnt that place is better.*

I think there is a direct relationship between education and wealth. Let look at the village and the city. If you go to the village there are no good drinking water, no good roads just to mention few just because the quality of the human resources there is too low in such a way that all these big industries do not want to establish there even though that is where most of these industries get their raw materials from.

Joyce *Oh you mean why I enroll in this program? I have two motives for enrolling in this program, the first is to acquire more knowledge and secondly to get the certificate so that I can get a better job. I know the job market is tight but I will try and see what happens.*

Yes it is true that education and for that matter adult education is one of the major tools for national development. Look the so called developed countries they are called so because they have high quality human resources. Education and for that matter adult education can help reduce poverty and unemployment.

Grace *To get good a good job after my studies.*

I do not think any nation can developed without some level of education. Our cities are developed because they have qualitative human resources which are able to cope with the current changes in the world.

As a way of eliciting information about students views on the impact of adult education on national development, five students were interviewed. The interview was transcribed and a summary of the findings are presented above. From the interview transcription it was clear that similar to the information from the questionnaire most of the respondents were of the view that they hope to get a better job after the completion of the programme. In addition to this it was clear that the respondents do consider a direct relationship between education and national development and some were of the view that no nation can develop without quality human resources. Also it was clear that the respondents have a strong conviction that the development of most of the developed countries can be traced back to their well-developed human resources.

DISCUSSION

The main aim of this study was to examine adult education students' attitude toward adult education programme and also examine students' view on the role of adult education in national development. The results from the study indicates that even though the majority of the respondents were between the ages of 35-50 years and above but a substantial number of the respondents were still young and this can be considered as a great asset for national development. That is to say more people are becoming interested in adult education programs as an alternative form of education.

It was interesting to note that almost all the students who took part in the study had a positive attitude toward adult education programmes and see it a one of the best means of developing themselves so as to become employed and earn a better living. Also the study revealed that despite the importance of adult education programmes, most students were faced with financial constraint. This goes to support Filla (1996) assertion that financial constraints continue to occupy the top most position on the list of challenges facing adult education programmes.

BIODATA AND CONTACT ADDRESS OF AUTHOR



ERNEST AMPADU holds a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics Education from the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, a Research Master's Degree in International and Comparative Education from Stockholm University, Sweden and MA in Adult Learning from Linköping University, Sweden. He is currently a PhD student at the Faculty of Education, Anglia Ruskin University. His research interest is in mathematics teaching and learning and staff development.

Ernest AMPADU
Faculty of Education
Sawyers 201
Anglia Ruskin University
Chelmsford, Essex
CM1 1SQ
UNITED KINGDOM

Phone Number: +447717620501

Email: ernestampadu@yahoo.ca

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