Quality in Adult Education in the Context of Higher Education

Pasipanodya Taddious Morgan[1], Mufunani Tungu Khosa[2]

[1]*Lecturer, Faculty of Education: Zimbabwe Open University*
[2]*Senior Lecturer, Zimbabwe Open University*

Corresponding Author: **Pasipanodya Taddious Morgan, Lecturer, Faculty of Education: Zimbabwe Open University*

Abstract: *Quality as a social construct is both a tool for wielding power and a tool for development and change. It is therefore a package that gets unpacked by studying it. It manifests itself in many different forms and in various contexts. Quality has caught the attention of many researchers and scholars because of public outcry of lack or decline in quality of education world over. Adult education comes to the lame light in this regard because of lack clear cut policies and its second rating status. The importance of understanding perceptions of students towards quality of their programmes cannot be emphasised. Quality is an important social construct concept in the teaching and learning of adults these days especially in the light of globalisation, marketization, massive expansion in education and shifting of focus of adult against scarce resources. It matters very much in the adult education context because it is associated with value, motivation, performance success, and growth and competition in society.*

Keywords: *Quality, social construct, higher education, adult, context*

1. BACKGROUND

The concept of adult education and the trending patterns will be discussed before defining adult will be explained followed by definition of quality, adult education, quality education and others. There is a section set aside for definition of key terms. Globally, the growth and importance of adult education in development cannot be over-emphasized particularly in adult and higher education institutions where the enrolment of the adult education population constitute between 40-45% (Mclallum, 2012) With the demand of adult education rising to these unprecedented levels as a result of provision of access through open and distance education, the issues of quantity versus quality become topical and of great concern to both public and private sectors. Allen and Seaman (2016)'s report on online learning shows that enrolment in distance education is still growing, with a rate of 3.9% despite the public outcry for lack of quality in both its processes and outcomes. Shava, (2021) have raised concern regarding quality in Primary School Teachers Education Colleges, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) teacher development programmes and declining quality assurances in higher education. In all the three contexts mentioned, the learners are adults who come to these institutions with vast amount of varied experiences attained from their previous socialisation. In addition they also come with varied hopes and expectations to be fulfilled during the course of their learning.

Viewed specifically in the context of higher education in Africa, (Schindler et al., 2015; raise fundamental questions regarding the definition of quality and acknowledge the fact that defining quality is problematic. They stress the point that quality has many stakeholders among which includes teachers, lecturers, administrators, researchers, decision makers and others who have differing perceptions on it. Some have perceived quality in the context of power relations and its influence in organizations, Morley, (2003). In her book, Quality and Power in Higher Education, interrogates several critical issues on quality such as equality, gender, globalization and some aspect of knowledge economy which to a large extent influence the dynamics of quality and its sub systems such as quality audit, quality assurance, quality enhancement and quality management. Others like Deming (2016) define quality in terms of customer satisfaction.

When combined with other relative terms such as "education" " adult " and "perception" to come up with statements such as perception of quality in adult education or perception of quality adult education or quality education for adult the matter becomes complicated. There is need to spell out the context in which these terms are used and the meaning attached to them.

1.2. Adult Education

Despite these multiple challenges, there are some definitions that are used to undertake the various activities and initiatives. For example, some scholars Knowles within or even outside the field have described adult education as a process, an activity, a programme, discipline and others. So in exploring issues of quality in adult education it is important to establish the definitions of terms attached to adult education and the contexts in which they are used.

Adult education can be defined as a practice in which adults participate in methodological and organised activities through which they can facilitate their understanding and learning, (Kapur, 2019)

2. DEFINITION OF QUALITY EDUCATION

Writing on Quality education, Smof (2020) claims that an education system is of good quality when the students in it have relatively high scores on standardized acquisition tests. Nixon (2011) along the same lines in the public good- imagining the university alludes to how quality enhancement is manifested in the processes of imagining social, civic and cosmopolitan constructs. Nixon, (2011) argues that the definition of education quality must take into account results obtained by the student which include satisfaction, level of the student achievement in relation to learning goals, low disparities in student achievement, and high completion rates. The working definition of adult education for this study refers a practice in which people aged 25 years and above engage in systematic and sustained self-educating activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitude and values for personal fulfilment as a long lifelong learner.

A close analysis of the definitions of the key concepts, education, quality, and adult education seem to suggest that they come from adult educators, scholars other than from the adult learners themselves.

2.1. Quality in Adult and Higher Education

Quality in adult higher education refers to situation where needs, hopes and aspirations of adult learners are addressed, (Stanistreet, 2019) This means that we can only ascertain quality in adult education if we are able to locate and situate adult learners needs , hopes and aspirations within adult education activities and then strive to have them addressed and redressed through dialogue. In the case of pre- service adult learners in teacher development programmes such as post graduate diploma students, the gap in knowledge and pedagogical/and ragogical skills drive them to take a reflective process which eventually compels them to engage in a pre-service training programme.

2.2. Quality in Adult Education in Developed Countries

Quality is governed by context time and space. The following paragraphs present the status of quality in adult education in developed countries namely United States of America, United Kingdom, the Scandinavian countries before looking at Asia and Africa. The review will concentrate on Africa before narrowing down to look at Zimbabwe, the country in which the study is situated.

2.3. Quality in Adult Education in the United States of America

The concept and practice of quality in adult education in the USA is parallel to adult education programme improvement in the private sector (Zigler and Bigman, 2007). In government, in the USA, quality was adopted in response to rising costs, decreased quality of services as an initiative to bolster government performance under the mantra reinventing the government, Deming, Osborne and Gaebler (1992). It is around this time that emphasis was placed on the need for program quality and accountability in adult education programmes mandated by the 1991 and 1998 legislation. Based on what is coming out in the literature above, it appears that quality both as a concept and in practice is being acknowledged as an important phenomenon. It is tied to cost. It is reasonable to also suggest that it can be used to raise the profile of a service or a commodity. In the USA quality is highly valued by private sector. Government also got interested and quality and issues of legislation and policy formulation is apparent. It also evident from the citation made above that performance and accountability are key constructs that may be used to measure quality.

2.4. Quality in Adult Education in England

In England, adult education has a long history, the university of the air concept being particularly acknowledged, (Kelly, 2020) was subjected to quality management regimes. The Russell report acknowledges the financing of adult education implying that it was subject to regular monitoring and evaluation and therefore experienced quality assurance processes a long time ago. However there were concerns raised about the demise of adult education in England following serious budget cuts during the austerity measures. While at the time of the Russell adult education activities and initiatives had declined, the major issues with employment and the advent of the COVID-19 and its impact on the population Great Britain has brought about new fresh thinking about adult education. For example, the pandemic's impact on unemployment during the second quarter of 2021, is anticipated to a peak of 2.6 million individuals. The need for adults to reskill and upskill in order to address the challenges cannot be over emphasized (Great Britain. Parliament House of Commons. Education Committee (2020)

2.5. Quality in Adult Education in Scandinavian Countries

In another study, Roberts (2013) acknowledges the presence of quality management system in adult education programmes in the Scandinavian countries. In his analysis of the systems they concluded that whilst there was evidence of quality existence, the quality was poor and needed to be improved. There are efforts being made to strengthen quality management in adult education suggesting that adult education is receiving high priority rating. This in its own right is a manifestation of quality. A dimension that can be acknowledged.

Quality in adult education has been debated along the lines of non-formal education and therefore has received very little attention and support. The concept of quality suffers the challenges that both adult education and non- formal suffer from. That is to say they are neglected and marginalized. Because if this, funding and visibility for adult education has been major a constraint for its development. Latchem, (2012) acknowledges the fact that it is harder for governments to set up quality assurance mechanisms for adult and non-formal education because they firstly, do not have the financial and human resources demanded by quality regimes. Secondly, adult and non –formal education unlike formal education do not fully comply to government rules and regulations because they have fast and hard rules that govern them. They are flexible, are not examined and state funded. For example, short term activities that are not examined and certificated and are done on ad hoc basis.

2.6. Quality in Adult Education in Asia

Chee Choy (2017) using a mixed method approach, undertook a study to examine student perception of quality learning in Malaysian University and found out that there was a positive relationship between student perceptions of learning outcomes, curriculum, instructional delivery and support, learning environment and quality learning. This study like many others cited earlier on, does have practical implications for government, administrators and other stakeholders in that the results generate useful evidence for use in the implementation of adult education programmes.

2.7. Quality in Adult Education in Africa

Writing on quality financing of higher education in Nigeria, Ekankumo and Kemebaradikumo (2014) acknowledge existence of both the meaning of quality and approaches to quality and education traditions. They identify seven different types of meanings and five approaches to quality as humanistic, behavioural, critical, indigenous and adult education approaches. Cheng, Taylor, Williams and Kang Tong (2016) carried out a study in Africa using the expectancy value theory as lens to explore the student satisfaction and perception of quality and found out that satisfactions is not necessarily perceived as an indicator of quality education.

In Africa unlike other countries in the north, the understanding of the issues on quality in adult education has been understood through research on exploring the experiences of adult learners as they partook various innovative teacher development programmes. For example in South Africa, Muzindutsi and Khanare (1918) conducted a study to explore the challenges faced by a group of students who enrolled for a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) as a pathway to a teaching profession. The findings of the study revealed that the pre-service teachers experienced

three categories of challenges related to terminologies and learning style used in education, challenges related to the structure of the programme and challenges related to the academic background from the undergraduate qualification. Findings of this study are important in the sense that they help scholars in understanding, first the perceptions and attitudes students have towards quality learning and this will, in the long run help educators in programme design and implementation. .

Adult learning institutions, especially those that offer Open and Distance Education courses suffer many challenges some of which affect the delivery of services affecting both the teaching and learning quality. In some instances, these challenges invariably spill over to the learners. It could be argued that challenges that face institutions which deliver adult education programmes, either as pre-service providers, adult and distance education institutions affect the quality of their services, will in some way affect the learner, their quality of learning and the perceptions they hold regarding the institutions and the services they provide. Rockwell, Schauer, Fritz and Max as cited in King (2012) found out that perceived lack of institutional support and training, inadequate compensation, and incentive structures, loss of autonomy and control of the curriculum, lack of technical support and lack of the release time are some of the obstacles that impinge upon effective and quality provision. There are controversies surrounding Open and Distance Learning delivered programmes as far as quality is concerned. There are on one hand those that claim and argue along lines that Open and Distance learning delivered programmes are efficient, and cost effective, of high quality and benefits derived from them are vital for economic and social development, (Pardasani, Goldkind, Heyman and Cross-Denny, (2012). It is also argued along the same lines that Open and Distance Learning is capable of providing human resource required for leadership, management, business and professional positions by inculcating relevant knowledge and advanced skills. Krishnan (2012) acknowledges that Open Distance Learning do produce public and private benefits. In addition, ODL is becoming an accepted and much appreciated indispensable part of the main stream educational systems (King,2012).

On the other hand, there are some scholars who argue against the view that ODL is effective and produces high quality outcomes. Majoni and Chidakwa (2005) assert that the area of controversy regarding ODL is whether the proliferation of courses offered on line and the manner in which technology is used has transformed the traditional classroom format into an ODL. It is plausible to suggest that, given this controversy, it is prudent to assess the acceptance of ODL mode of instruction by an adult student as a critical factor that has to be evaluated in order to assess the adequacy of ODL system. It is argued that implementation of ODL programmes is capable of supporting teaching and learning activities and student experience, (Gemmel, et al. 2011). If it does so, then the desired learning quality which is sought would be realized. This study, in searching for the perception of learning quality of Post Graduate Adult Learners will assist in better understanding of what constitute learning quality from the learner perspective.

3. CONCLUSION

The low status and recognition of adult learning and education in comparison to other parts of the education system remains a barrier to realising its rich potential. Notwithstanding the wide benefits of adult learning education and the broad range of research attesting to them, some of it captured here, it remains a low priority in most countries. In too many cases, it is under-funded, under-researched and under-understood. There are deep and persistent inequalities in adult learning participation, both within and between countries, with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups faring worst. And even though participation is going up in many countries, progress is insufficient, given the social, economic, technological and environmental challenges we face.

REFERENCES

Allen & Seaman (2016). Decolonizing philosophies of education: An introduction in *decolonizing philosophies of education* (pp. 1-13). Brill.

Chee Choy, J., Williams (2016). Student satisfaction and perceptions of quality: testing the linkages for PhD students. *Higher Education Research &Development*, *35*(6), 1153-1166.

Cheng, M., Taylor, J., Williams, J., & Tong, K. (2016). Student satisfaction and perceptions of quality: testing the linkages for PhD students. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *35*(6), 1153-1166.

Deming, R. S. (2021). Nexus Between Quality of Education, Student Satisfaction and Student Loyalty: The Case of Department of English Teacher Education at Universitas Islam Negeri in Indonesia. *International Journal for Quality Research*, *15*(1), pages.

Ekankumo, B., & Kemebaradikumo, N. (2014). Quality financing of higher education in Nigeria: a nostrum for the provision of quality education. *Journal of Education and Practice*, *5*(19), 78-90.

Gaebler, D. (1992). *What Is Quality in Higher Education?* Taylor & Francis, 1900 Frost Road, Bristol, PA 19007-1598.

Kapur, G. K. (2017). Quality in higher education from different perspectives: a literature review. *International journal for quality research*, *11*(1), 17.

Kelly, C. (2020). Quality assurance in online distance education. Online distance education: Towards a research agenda, 311. Website?

King, G. K. (2017). Quality in higher education from different perspectives: a literature review. *International journal for quality research*, *11*(1), 17.

Latchem, C. (2012). Quality assurance in online distance education. Online distance education: Towards a research agenda, 311. Website?

Maphosa,C., & Bhebhe,S. (2020) Examining the learning styles of open and distance education learners in one Southern African University. Asian Journal of Distance Education, 15(1), 257-268.

McCallum, Constance L., "The Perception of Adult Learners Concerning their Satisfaction of Their Educational Experiences in a Midwestern Community College" (2012). Dissertations. 30. https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/30.

Morley, T.A. (2003) How do learners view adult education? Women learners' perception on the Ethiopia's adult education programme. Heliyon. 2022 Apr 12;8(4): e09272.doi: 10.1016/j.heliyon. 2022.e09272. PMID: 35497043; PMCID: PMC9038553.

Nixon, P. (2011) Postgraduate Programme, The Journal of Continuing Higher Education, 66:2, 88-105, DOI: Postgraduate Programme, The Journal of Continuing Higher Education, *66*(2), 88-105, DOI:

Roberts, T. (2013). Students' perceptions of STEM learning after participating in a summer informal learning experience. *International journal of STEM education*, *5*(1), 1-14. Use capital letters at the beginning of each word on the journal name.

Shava, G. N. (2021). Implementation of quality Assurance Standards in Zimbabwean context of Higher Education: What are the challenges. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, *5*(6), 2454-6186.

Smof, M. (2020). Limitations of human capital theory, Studies in Higher Education, 44:2, 287-301, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2017.1359823.

Stanistreet, R. D. (2021). Human Capital Theory in Respect to Cultural, Digital Implications and Integrated Communication. *Ovidius University Annals, Economic Sciences Series*, *21*(2), 527-531.

Žigler, R. and Bigman, M. (2003). Managing higher education in Lithuania: new challenges in the new millenium. *Pedagogika*, 24-28.