

# Continuing Education and Development in the Nation's Democratic Dispensation in Nigeria

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10200155>

Received: 20 October 2025; Accepted: 25 October 2026; Published: 27 February 2026

## ABSTRACT

The paper examines the concept of continuing education as a catalyst for development in the present Democratic Dispensation in Nigeria. The paper explains the relationship that exists between Adult and Continuing education. It further states that Continuing Education and other programmes under adult education are still very relevant in the present-day depressed economy. The paper goes further to look at the functions of Continuing education, the impact or societal changes on continuing education such as the nagging depressed economy which encourages expansion of continuing education that has makes it possible for all citizens to embark on various programmes because of its flexibility. The rapid technological changes and increasing inflation likewise the demand for multi-skills acquisition which are all calling for a growing efforts in continuing education, so as to enhance the nation's democratic dispensation in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Continuing education, development, democratic dispensation, nation.

## INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, there are certain slogans within the framework of national development plan, these slogans include "Affordable Housing for All", "My health, My Right", "Education for All", just as it was in the past when year 2002 was the targeted year. Unfortunately, this expectation became a mirage or an illusion under democratic dispensation. It is on this note that education accessibility and sustained programmes on education has been politicised and trivialised, thereby curbing or reducing the expectation and increasing the gap between the educationally advantaged and educationally disadvantaged within Nigeria's educational environment.

There is no nation that can afford to toy with educational sector especially in democratic stratum, and the expansionary trend in its human resources development towards meeting the continuing need of its national developmental objectives. The question that now arises is, what then becomes the place of continuing education in meeting these development changes in Nigeria? This is part of what this paper focuses on.

Without mincing word, Nigeria has no doubt made significant progress in continuing education and development since the return of democracy in 1999. Nigeria has made progress under the current democratic dispensation after almost three decades of military intervention in political experience. However, Nigeria democratic experience since independence in 1960 has been a chequered, one plagued by military coups and a lack of a sense of national unity on the part of the political class who often result to divisive tendencies along religious, regional and ethnic lines. The government has established several initiatives to promote lifelong learning, skills acquisition and professional development.

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) which was resuscitated in 2001 and the National Teachers Institute (NTI) are examples of Institutions providing opportunities for continuing education among others. In addition, continuing education is playing important role in addressing developmental changes in Nigeria across the various sectors. For instance, in the areas of skill enhancement, where continuing education programmes help individuals acquire new skills or upgrade existing ones which is very crucial for economic growth, skilled labour can also attract Foreign investment and boost local industries. So also, Entrepreneurship which lead to job creation, Digital Literacy, just to mention a few.

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## Adult Education

Adult education is the practice of teaching and engaging adults in systematic voluntary learning activities to acquire new knowledge, skills, or attitude. embraces all levels of work and may be planned to meet the need of every segment of the society. The fact that it is continuing, remedial, liberal, as well as vocational makes it both vital useful, essential and relevant to every segment of the nation. There are innumerable meaning ascribes to adult education. For instance, Ayantunji (2023) refers to adult education as any educational programmes(s) organised for adults and youths regardless of its contents, place of study and also has to be flexible in order to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the beneficiaries and their communities. This concept explains the fact that any set of instructions given to the adult would constitute adult education. According to UNESCO (2015; 2022), adult education comprises all formal, non-formal, and informal learning processes whereby individuals recognised as adults develop, enrich capabilities, and improve technical, professional qualifications. It is an integral, lifelong process aimed at fostering personal development and social participation. adopts the age criterion but reduces the age limit when it states that the term adult education covers all organised educational activities provided for people who are not in the regular school and university system and who are generally fifteen or older.

Adult education embraces all levels of education work and may be planned to meet the need of every segment of society. It is however clear that Adult education is not the same thing as continuing education. Continuing education is just an aspect of adult education which means that continuing education is one out of the series of Programmes under adult education. Apart from continuing education, other programmes under the umbrella of Adult Education include the following:

**Liberal education** – This is an approach to undergraduate education that promotes integration of learning across the Curricular and Co-curricular and between academic and experiential learning, in order to develop specific learning outcomes that are essential for work, citizenship and life.

**Extra-mural Education** – This education refers to educational programmes and activities conducted to the traditional four walls of a classroom or campus setting. These programmes are often designed to be more accessible and flexible, thereby, allowing people to pursue learning opportunities without the constraints of formal education environments.

**Mass Education** - This type of education refers to the system of providing education to a large segment of the population, typically, through public institutions such as schools, Colleges, and Universities. The major goal of Mass education is to ensure that basic education is made accessible to all individuals, regardless of their Socioeconomic backgrounds.

**Workers Education** - This type of education is a special kind of adult education designed to give workers a better understanding of their status, rights and responsibilities as workers, as union members, as family members and as Citizens. Workers Education emphasises group advancement and solution of group problems.

**Lifelong Learning/Education** – According to UNESCO (2023), lifelong learning within the context of adult education says it is not just about acquiring new skills but also about fostering personal growth and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2025) describes lifelong learning as the continuous, purposeful, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout a person's life, from cradle to grave.

**Out-of-school Education** – Out of school learning is an educational concept that consists of curricular and noncurricular learning experiences for pupils and students outside the school environment. The programmes are designed to provide educational opportunities for children, youth and adults who are enrolled in traditional schools or who need supplementary education.

**Informal Education** - Informal education refers to a lifelong learning process whereby each individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment and from daily experiences.

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## Concepts of Continuing Education

Continuing Education covers a wide spectrum of educational operations, services and enquiry on different settings outside the formal school system, adults engage in learning activities for functional activity.

It will be necessary to look at scholars' views on the concepts, 'continuing education'. According to Robat, Robert and Angharad (2003). "Continuing education is meant to provide education for all citizens, provision of such education for all ensures continuing and flexibility in education to make possible the continued relevance of individuals in the society helping government to give education to all citizens, helping to retrieve the economic wastage of early school leavers.

Aldridge and Horrocks (2002) define continuing education as a form of educational activity organised and run outside the formal school system, and at times, paralleled to but often time, going beyond the preview of the school systems.

From the above definitions, it is noted that continuing education is meant for those who had left earlier, the formal school system. Thus, it is a programme designed to cover all shades of educational endeavours to cater for candidates that are deficient in one form or the other. While it covers such special programmes such as: sandwich classes, external studies, distance education, correspondence education, Remedial classes and even adult literacy classes.

After categorising the various programmes under adult education, Hillage, Uden, Aldridrdge, and Eccles (2000) went further to say that continuing education programme are expected to produce a variety of outcomes. These include; the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. It is therefore necessary to note that continuing education practices in a democratised Nigeria society becomes an instrument per excellence for the democratisation process, especially, the nascent democracy of Nigeria. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) baseline on the theory and principle underlying the practices of continuing education is that a man needs education at every stage of life.

## Adult Education in the Context of Continuing Education

According to Ayantunji (2023), there is need to re-examine the content of adult education, as it seems to neglect the education of the child, which it is supposed to take care of. This is under the submission that adult education should not only operate within the range of adulthood upward but it should cut across the age boundaries. Traditional education had room for a child's learning to become an adult. Hence, adult education appears to be more appropriate if undergone in childhood and youth, if only to be forearmed for adulthood. Adult aptitude appears to be an essential prerequisite to foot the acquisition of adult type of education. Adult education should not be seen as education meant for those persons who have reached adult age.

Apart from UNESCO (2015; 2022) supporting adult education for youth in practice, we often find young people in extra-mural classes. Children or youth are known to possess adult potentialities within the child or youths. Hence, adult education is relevant to be overall or continuing education of youth and children. As for the adult persons, they will need adult education to enhance their adulthood or to remedy any defects in their childhood or youth, which may be in the area of helping them to adjust to new environments or situations, in order to achieve their life aspirations faster and even more easily.

This adjustment is the much-needed continuing process for adult. As a matter of fact, adults will need one kind of adult education programme or the other to survive the rapidly changing and complex world that we are in.

## Democracy and Continuing Education

The democratic concept is characterised by substantial ambiguity, with its meaning still suffering variability in outlook depending on who is giving the definition. However, President Abraham Lincoln, in his 1863 presidential speech defined democracy in what has become the most popular definition as the "government of the people, by the people and for the people". As far as Lincoln was concerned, the elements of democracy are:

(a) Participation of the populace in the governing process and,

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(b) Equity of all men in the process of governance.

Another conception of democracy is that of Kelvin and Nathaniel (2022), who posited that democracy “is a political system and one of its characteristics is the quality of being completely or almost completely responsive to all citizens”. This definition that stresses responsiveness to the citizens’ problem whether social or otherwise also underscored Olaniyan (2020) opinion which also emphasised people-centeredness of democracy. Olaniyan (2020) also opined that “adherents of both liberal and communist conceptions of democracy would agree that any adequate conception of it must start from the notion of government that would empower its citizenry in a way that such citizens shall be able to maximally function socially”. It is clear that democracy cannot be created in practice or defined in theory without the recognition of the central position of the people.

Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo was a strong nationalist who believed in the democratic freedom of the individual citizen in Nigeria. In 1955, in anticipation of regional self-government in Nigeria, he foresaw the attendant need for the electorates to be enlightened in a democratic government, no wonder why ‘free education programme’ had always been part of his cardinal programmes. This was in view of the fact democracy can never and has never thrived in any community with a low percentage of educated people. And as time marches on, so also, all facts of public life, education inclusive change with time. Here then lies the necessity of deliberate organised continuing education programme for the citizenry.

Osaghae (2020) states that democracy can only mean “the rule of the people as a *WHOLE*, and this cannot be substituted for by the rule of some people even when they are chosen by the people”. Today’s democracy is inevitably and necessarily representational. It operates through representatives who form a minority relative to the larger civic population. The ‘wholeness’ in Whollhein’s concept could therefore mean true representation which starts from the grassroots rationalisation which will therefore result into creation of democratic values and structures. So also, democratic political system, as well as ensuring the rights and participation of people in all spheres of national life. Thus, true representation can only come from grassroots through deliberate enlightenment given to the people in continual basis. To ensure the right and participation of the people in all ramifications, there is the need to remove or reduce the powerlessness and helplessness of the citizens, which hinder their ability to function maximally. So many citizens are been deprived socially and have been traumatised in young democracies like Nigeria because of the social structures that exist in the policy. It is however clear that the only instrument that can be used to permit and encourage the masses to participate in and determine the processes of exercising state power will be in the people’s *EDUCATION* that is functional and continuous. Education opens the eyes of citizens and empower and equip them adequately to face the challenges of contemporary social complexities. Education is an instrument that is seen as solution to problem that is economic, political, technological or even spiritual in nature.

However, it is pathetic to note that education in Nigeria has been politicised just like any other social services, which therefore makes it unaffordable to most Nigerians. Education is expected to be a conscience awakening instrument, leading to the liberation of the minds of individuals in the society, when it is not available to a segment of the society, inequality in conscience-awakening and mind-liberation set in, unequal education cannot lead us to equal liberation. For instance, in Nigeria, where there is a great disparity in the quality and quantity of education available to rich and poor families, this cannot lead to emergence of individuals whose minds have been sufficiently liberated to function maximally and to participate effectively in expected societal roles. An example of performance expected societal role that leads to optimal social functioning is in the area of employment, poorly educated individual cannot be expected to do the work that requires high cognitive skills which thorough education gives.

It is on this note that Ramtohul (2021) posits that continuing education is strictly an adult education concepts. It stresses the provision of educational opportunities for adults after cessation of formal schooling. It means education and re-education training provide opportunities which are made available to people out-of-school, young school leavers, the employed and the unemployed. It gives the ‘early leavers’ the opportunity to “drop-in” again, so that they can have the opportunity if achieving what they have not been able to achieve before. There are many reasons that could be responsible for dropping-out of formal school, which include poverty, lack of adequate exposure, death of parents, inability to cope mentally with academic work and nonavailability of dedicated teachers. The philosophy underlying continuing education is that, every human being needs education at every point in life and in every environment, be it social, economic, political or occupational.

Information and Communication Technology has turned the world into a “global-village” and education is required for man to function effectively in ever-changing world. For the benefits of those who for various reasons cannot obtain education in formal setting, the only avenue available is through continuing education, which may take the form of apprenticeship in a trade of choice by the individual or taking a degree course on part time basis or attending the various evening classes to obtain an SSCE certificate or any other certificate. Thus, continuing education is expected to produce a variety of outcomes, which include acquisition of new knowledge, skills, values, orientation and attitudes. The achievements of these outcomes are dependent on the values placed on continuing education by the government.

It is no gain saying that educated people are better and easier to govern than a pack of illiterates. Continuing education will continue to guarantee the production and development of qualified and well-learned citizenry while illiteracy will serve as a threat to democracy. The practice of continuing education within the context of a democratised Nigeria is a vital factor in the sustenance of democracy and democratic ideas, values and principles. Without continuing education, training and re-training programme for updating of the knowledge and skills of workers, in the application of modern technology, improved productivity will be a serious mirage.

### **Contributions of Continuing Education in the Society**

Continuing education plays a vital roles in empowering adult citizens in Nigeria, contributing to their personal and societal development. Some of the key roles include the following:

1. Improved literacy and numeracy skills.
2. Enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.
3. Increased political awareness and participation.
4. Economic empowerment through vocational and entrepreneurial skills.
5. Social mobility and reduced poverty amongst the populace.
6. Better health and wellness knowledge.
7. Adaptability of technological advancement.
8. Fostering a culture of democracy and good governance.
9. Promoting human rights and social justice.
10. Empowering women and marginalized group.
11. Encouraging lifelong learning and personal growth.
12. Community engagement and leadership development.
13. Building a more informed and engaged citizenry.
14. Cultural preservation and promotion.
15. Environmental awareness and sustainability.

However, challenges persist and the need for a new constitution and electoral reform remains a pressing issue.

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

By providing adult citizens with continuing education opportunities Nigeria can harness the potential of its adult population, leading to a more developed and prosperous society. Continuing education and development in a democratic dispensation in Nigeria has made significant progress under the current democratic rule, the country

has made considerable strides in several areas including technology. With the rise of online platforms as the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has made education more accessible to a wider population which include working adults as well as those in remote areas, technological advancement has made the use of e-learning tools and mobile technology to deliver education, making it possible and convenient for learners to access courses and material from anywhere in the world at any point in time. It has also prompted Nigerian universities and polytechnics to introduce more flexible learning options, including evening classes and weekend programmes to accommodate working students. Part of the strides made in the country is the regular hosting of educational conferences workshops and seminars that focus on continuing education and professional development. This often warrant collaboration among educators, professionals and policy makers.

Likewise, in electoral processes there is great improvement as efforts have been focused on enhancing transparency credibility and efficiency of election with the introduction of use of technology into electoral process with the use INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV) which allows for real – time viewing of election results, enhancing transparency.

The paper therefore recommends that voters' education campaign should be more enhanced and strengthening of legal frameworks and a host of other strides put in place to ensure that election process is credible, free, fair and that no eligible voter is disenfranchised. Politicians should also be challenged to ensure that the electoral reforms being put in place by INEC and the National Assembly are not jeopardised. In view of the present challenges facing continuing education in Nigeria, continuing education should be repositioned to meet the ever-increasing demand of the present time in order to contribute meaningfully to national development.

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