



PROMOTING ETHICAL AND VALUE EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY IN NIGERIA: IMPERATIVE OF ADULT EDUCATION



¹ Ekpenyong, Violet Oyo (Ph. D.)

² Catherine Njong Tawo (Ph. D.)

³ Olofu Paul Agbade (Ph. D.)

⁴ Ibok, Emmanuel O. (Ph. D.)

¹⁻⁴ Department of Continuing Education and Development Studies
University of Calabar, Calabar – Nigeria
Corresponding author: paulagbade@gmail.com

Abstract

Sustainable development is the development that is aimed at meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. It balances the needs of the economy, environment, education and social wellbeing among others. Therefore, this paper centered on promoting ethical and value education for sustainable development in the 21st century in Nigeria: Imperative of adult education. The paper conceptualized the term-ethics and values education as a conscience-based education which deals with not mere theoretical engagement of adults with moral principles but involves an active and transformative process that equips individuals with the cognitive tools and emotional intelligence to make morally sound decisions and adopt socially responsible behaviors. Further examined in this paper was the concept of sustainable development as conceived by different scholars. Ethical responsibilities of adult educators were also extensively explicated. Ethical and values challenges in adult education were explicated herein. The relationship between ethical/value education and sustainable development was examined in-depth. The study concluded that empowering adults through ethical and value education is not a luxury; it is a necessity for a just, inclusive, and sustainable world. It was recommended among others that adult educators and policy makers should intentionally design curricula that reflect ethical and values considerations and incorporate values such as sustainability, integrity, social justice, equity and global citizenship among others.

Keywords: Adult Education, Ethical and Value Education and Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Adult education simply refers to any form of educational programme which is designed for adult learners in order to enable them acquire relevant knowledge, skills, values or experience; thereby making them relevant to themselves and the society at large. In the opinion of Olofu and Ironbar (2017), adult education encompasses all forms of learning activities aimed at helping adults improve themselves by acquiring knowledge and skills in order to better their lives. Adult education manifests itself in different types (formal, informal and non-formal) and patterns or forms (women education, community development, cooperative education, vocational education, social development and extension education etc).

Therefore, adult education does not only help the learners to acquire relevant knowledge and skills but also contributes to economic, political, social and sustainable development. This is corroborated by Ekpenyong, Wonah and Ushie (2017) who maintained that adult education is a powerful agent of socialization; as it plays an integral role in preparing an individual to render an active

service to the family and the society in general. Ekpenyong, Wonah and Ushie further stated that when adult population of the society is empowered educationally, they tend contribute to socio-economic, political and sustainable development of a nation.

Thus, considering the enormous role of adult education towards socio-economic and political development, it can serve as a veritable tool for promoting ethical and value education for sustainable development in Nigeria. According to Nwosu (2022), adults bring their wealth of experiences to bear in the process of learning and this is influenced by their prior knowledge, cultural beliefs and values. This complexity makes adult education a fertile ground for engaging in deep ethical inquiry and value education. When adults are encouraged to examine their values in the light of global challenges such as climate change, corruption, inequality and social justice amongst others, they are more likely to adopt behaviors and advocate for policies aligned with sustainable development. This is because adult education has the capacity to positively influence the behavior of the learners.

Conceptualization of ethical and value education

Ethical and value education is not merely about teaching people about differentiating right from wrong; it is about cultivating the capacity for critical reflection, empathy, social responsibility and long-term thinking. Matthew and Obiesili (2022) defined ethical and value education as a conscience-based education which deals with not mere theoretical engagement of adults with moral principles but involves an active and transformative process that equips individuals with the cognitive tools and emotional intelligence to make morally sound decisions and adopt socially responsible behaviors. In the view of Lehner and Kube (2020), when education explicitly focuses on ethics and values, it holds the potential to reshape worldviews, attitudes and conduct in profound ways. Ethics and value education deals with issues like moral principles and values that guides practices within the educational system. This could be in areas like academic integrity, fairness, students' rights and the responsibilities of educators etc.

Ethics and value education refers to the type of education which teaches the learners about the principles that govern behavior; delineating what is considered right or wrong, fair or unfair, just or unjust. In the context of adult education, it guides adult educators and institutions on their interactions with learners, their delivery of instruction and their evaluation methods. It is also concerned with what is the proper course of action for an adult facilitator towards the learners (Kanu, 2018). It studies right and wrong in human behaviours. To the extent one pursues rational ethical standard, he/she will be able to correctly organize his/her goals and actions to accomplish most pressing values.

Ethics and values education emphasizes on teaching the learners about the beliefs, values and attitudes that are very acceptable in a particular society. Ethics and values education can be both personal (held by the learner or educator) and institutional (embodied in organizational culture and curriculum). It also addresses the collective conception of what is considered good, desirable, proper or bad, undesirable and improper in a culture. As such, ethics and values education remains very central to human behaviour and sustainable development; as it guides the choices one makes and the way it influences the behaviour of everyone in the society (Dike, 2024).

According to Mukherjee (2020), values are the socially approved desires and goals that are internalized through the process of conditioning, learning or socialization and that become subjective preferences, standards and aspirations. Hence, ethics and value education helps to teach learners about the proper and standard way to do the right thing and be socially congruent in the society. Lehner and Kube (2020) perceived ethics and values education is an integral part of personal philosophy of life by which individuals are taught about the right way to behave in the society. The philosophy of life includes ideals, manner of thinking and the principles by which one's guide his/her behaviour.

Esu (2019) observed that ethics and values education focuses on concepts such as discipline, integrity, social justice, religious tolerance, patriotism, loyalty, courage, reliability, respect and godliness. Discipline suggests an orderly or prescribed conduct or pattern of behavior. It also implies self-control which requires exercising restraint over one's own impulses, emotions or desires. Integrity is the act of adhering to ethical or moral values. It also refers to being incorruptible (incapable of being

bribed or morally corrupted). Social justice is the equal distribution of resources and opportunities, irrespective of your status or background. Religious tolerance has to do with putting up with other people's religion without rancor or allowing other people to have or practice other religions and beliefs other than your own. Trust is the belief that somebody or something is good, sincere, honest etc. It promotes values by removing suspicion from people in the society. Tolerance refers to the willingness to accept opinions or behaviours of other people who may not like you. It makes one to respect other peoples views, culture and religion.

Concept of sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development is the process which is aimed at meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability is the foundation for today's leading global framework for international cooperation. United Nations (2022) see sustainable development as an approach to growth and human development that aims to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. According to Adams (2016), sustainable development refers to creating and maintaining the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony to support present and future generations. Airoidi, Turon, Perkol-finkel and Rius (2021) defined sustainable development as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

According to Robert, Parris and Leiserowitz (2015), the aim of sustainable development is to have a society where living conditions and resources meet human needs without undermining planetary integrity. Sustainable development aims to balance the needs of the economy, environment, and social well-being. Sustainable development overlaps with the idea of sustainability which is a normative concept.

UNESCO (2022) conceived sustainable development as the many processes and pathways to achieve it." There are some problems with the concept of sustainable development. From the environmental perspective, Brown (2015) see sustainable development as an approach to social, economic, and environmental planning that attempts to balance the social and economic needs of present and future human generations with the imperative of preserving, or preventing undue damage to, the natural environment. Sustainable development lacks a single detailed and widely accepted definition.

As a general approach to human development, Corben and Thompson (2020) maintained that sustainable development is frequently understood to encompass most if not all of the following goals, ideals, and values:

- i. A global perspective on social, economic, and environmental policies that takes into account the needs of future generations.
- ii. A recognition of the instrumental value of a sound natural environment, including the importance of biodiversity
- iii. The protection and appreciation of the needs of indigenous cultures
- iv. The cultivation of economic and social equity in societies throughout the world
- v. The responsible and transparent implementation of government policies.

Ethical responsibilities of educators in adult education

Adult educators are entrusted with the development of mature learners who often balance multiple responsibilities such as work, family and community involvement. Therefore, they are certain ethical responsibilities which adult facilitators are duty-bound to promote and sustain. Oluwagbohunmi (2019) outlined five major ethical responsibilities of adult educators/facilitators.

1. Respect for learner autonomy: It is the responsibility of adult educators to acknowledge adult learners as autonomous individuals who are capable of self-direction. Thus, Egenti and Obumse (2021) posited that ethical instruction allows adult learners to express their views, choose learning pathways and apply knowledge in ways that align with their goals.

2. Confidentiality and privacy: Adult educators have the responsibility to ensure that any information divulged by the learners must be kept secret. Ibok, Aniashi, Aya and Dennis (2023) stated that adult learners may disclose sensitive information during instruction; educators have a duty to protect such information and maintain professional boundaries.
3. Fair Assessment practices: It is an ethical responsibility of adult educators to ensure that assessments of the learners should be fair, transparent and reflective of the learner's understanding and growth. Bias and favoritism must be avoided.
4. Creating safe and inclusive learning environments: Adult educators must foster environments where all learners feel comfortable, respected, safe, secure and valued regardless of their ethnic and religious background, colour, race and ability. Dike (2024) admitted that in a learning environment where there is discrimination and the learners feel insecure and unsafe to learn, the entire process of teaching and learning is jeopardized.
5. Addressing power dynamics: Power imbalances between adult educators and their learners should be acknowledged and addressed. Ekpenyong, Tawo and Ibek (2024) advised that educators must avoid using their position to influence or manipulate learners.

According to Giannoukos, Basas, Galiropoulos and Hioctour (2015), the educators in adult education is ethically saddled with the responsibility to work towards achieving positive changes by coordinating the learning procedures in a way that enables the learner to overcome certain false beliefs he/she has due to social conditioning, his/her working environment and the way in which he/she has lives. Furthermore, adult educators should not only focus on transferring knowledge but need to encourage the learners to search for knowledge. As such, adult facilitators abiding by this ethical responsibility; makes learning creative and regenerative in nature.

In the same vein, Corben and Thompson (2020) observed that adult educators play important role in programme implementation. Hence, they must help adult learners improve their literacy skills; thereby, empowering them for sustainability. The educator must also allow the learners the freedom of thoughts, expression and ideas. Adult educator should possess the ability to be student centered, strengthen the confidence of the learners, have pedagogical training and knowledge of modern teaching techniques and believe in the value of education and training. They should also display a good knowledge and mastery of the educational process in order to impart sufficient knowledge onto the adult learner.

Ethical and values challenges in adult education

There are some common ethical dilemmas that may exist in adult learning settings. The ethical and values challenges vary from one adult learning environment to another Matthew and Obiesili (2022) as well as Ibok, Aniashi, Aya and Dennis (2023) highlighted some of the ethical challenges to include:

- i. **Cultural relativism vs. universal ethics:** There is always the challenge of balancing respect for cultural values with universal human rights and ethical standards. According to Adams (2016), often times, adult educators are cut in the web of whether to go by the cultural values of the learners or general ethical standards.
- ii. **Commercialization of education:** Navigating conflicts of interest in profit educational institutions. Egenti and Obumse (2021) reported that since establishing schools is a business venture, many private school owners are more interested in the financial benefit that accrues from their schools rather than ensuring that children are disciplined or ethics and values are maintained. Hence, an educator finding his/herself in an environment where discipline is not upheld cannot promote integrity and ethical values.
- iii. **Academic integrity:** In many institutions of learning at all levels, plagiarism, cheating and examination malpractice are often managed with empathy and fairness. Nwosu (2022) therefore, maintained that any learning environment that is characterized by cultism, indecent dressing, truancy, plagiarism, cheating and examination malpractice cannot promote ethics and values.

Ethical/value education and sustainable development in Nigeria

Ethical and value education lays the moral foundation for sustainable development. It aligns personal behavior with global sustainability goals, ensuring that development is not only economically and environmentally sound but also just, inclusive, and compassionate (Esu, 2019). Ibok, Aniashi, Aya and Dennis (2023) stated that one of the greatest barriers to sustainable development is not lack of knowledge but the gap between knowledge and action. Thus, ethical and value education plays a crucial role in achieving sustainable development by shaping individuals and societies to become more conscious of their responsibilities toward people, the planet and future generations. Adults who understand the ethical implications of unsustainable practices from overconsumption to systemic inequality are more likely to make conscious decisions that benefit both current and future generations. In the opinion of Ibok, Aniashi, Aya and Dennis (2023), adult education is not just about mere acquisition knowledge and skills, it is also about inculcation of morals and values in the learners so as to promote sustainable development. Ethical and value-based learning according to Dike (2024) plays the following role in sustainable development in Nigeria:

- i. It enhances personal growth and self-awareness.
- ii. Ethical and values promote social justice and community engagement.
- iii. It builds moral courage to confront societal challenges.
- iv. Ethical and values prepares learners for ethical leadership in their professions and communities.

Egenti and Obumse (2021) stated that ethical and value-based education plays pivotal role in ensuring sustainable development. Egenti and Obumse pinpointed the following roles of ethical and value-based education to sustainable development.

Ethical and values education promotes responsible citizenship: Ethical and values education encourages respect for human rights, social justice and equity. These values foster a sense of responsibility and community, motivating individuals to contribute to sustainable societies.

Encourages environmental stewardship: Ethical and value education instills a deep respect for nature and biodiversity. It helps individuals understand the importance of conserving resources, reducing pollution and protecting ecosystems essential components of environmental sustainability.

Supports economic and social equity: Sustainable development is not just about the environment, it also includes reducing poverty, inequality and promoting fair economic growth. Ethical education teaches fairness, integrity, and compassion, supporting inclusive policies and practices.

Fosters global awareness and cooperation: Ethical and values education cultivates empathy, tolerance, and intercultural understanding. These values are key in addressing global challenges like climate change, resource scarcity, and conflict, which require international collaboration and solidarity.

Ethical and value-based education builds a culture of peace and non-violence: Peace and non-violence are essential for sustainable societies. Ethical and values education teaches conflict resolution, dialogue and respect for diversity, which are critical for peaceful coexistence and sustainable communities.

Ethical and value-based education empowers adult and youths for sustainable action: By integrating ethics into education, young and old alike will develop critical thinking, decision-making, and ethical leadership skills. They become agents of change, capable of driving sustainable innovations and policies.

Kanu (2018) opined that in the quest for sustainable development, adults hold a pivotal role not just as policymakers, professionals, and caregivers, and also as active agents of change within their communities. While much of the discourse around sustainability centers on technological innovation or economic reform, the ethical and moral foundations guiding individual and collective actions are equally if not more crucial. Empowering adults through ethical and value-based education is essential for creating a society capable of sustaining itself environmentally, socially and economically.

In the opinion of Nwabuani (2023), ethical and values education encourages orderliness and good conduct of the learners. In a society where there is orderliness and good conduct, there is likelihood of sustainable development. Ethical and values education also encourages credibility. Teaching children national values will encourage credibility which is needed for fighting the war against corruption. Credibility promotes integrity and being incorruptible. Nwabuani maintained that



ethical and values education ensures equal distribution of resources, opportunities and privileges. Ethical and values education encourages tolerance and corporate co-existence.

Conclusion

Empowering adults through ethical and value education is not a luxury; it is a necessity for a just, inclusive, and sustainable world. Sustainable development demands not only innovation and efficiency but also wisdom, compassion, and courage—the fruits of deep ethical engagement. If adults are to lead and model sustainable practices, they must be equipped not just with technical knowledge, but with the moral compass to navigate complex global challenges. Education that nurtures both the mind and the conscience is the true foundation for lasting change. The integration of ethics and values in adult learning is not merely an academic ideal it is a necessity. As adult learners bring a wealth of experiences, beliefs, and goals to the classroom, educators must provide not only knowledge but also a moral and values-driven compass to guide their learning journey. Ethics and values serve as foundational pillars that uphold the dignity, rights, and aspirations of learners, creating educational experiences that are inclusive, meaningful, and transformative. In a world increasingly shaped by complexity and diversity, ethical and values-driven adult learning is essential for fostering responsible global citizens capable of thoughtful action and positive change.

Recommendations

The following suggestions have been made to improve ethical and value education in adult education:

- i. Adult educators and policy makers should intentionally design curricula that reflect ethical and values considerations and incorporate values such as sustainability, integrity, social justice, equity and global citizenship among others.
- ii. Andragogical strategies like problem-based learning, experiential learning, and transformative learning which naturally lend themselves to discussions of ethics and values should be employed by adult facilitators in the course of teaching the learners.
- iii. Educational institutions should model ethical behaviors and uphold values through their policies, faculty conduct and learner support services.
- iv. Both educators and learners should engage in reflective practices to examine how their values shape learning experiences and relationships.

References

- Airoidi, L., Turon, X., Perkol-finkel, S. & Rius, M. (2021). Corridors for aliens but not for native: Effects of marine urban sprawl at a regional scale. *Diversity and Distributions*, 21(7), 755-768.
- Adams J. (2016). Sustainable development of community projects. *Prestige*, 5 (3), 74-83).
- Brown, J. H. (2015). The oxymoron of sustainable development. *Bio Science*. 65 (10): 1027–1029.
- Corben, H. & Thompson, K. (2020). What makes a great teacher' attributes of excellence in VET. Paper presented at the INTAFA Educational Services Research Conference Sydney, Australia.
- Dike, V. E. (2024). Values education and national development file. Ibadan: Spectrum Limited.
- Egenti, U. P. & Obumse, N. A. (2021). Effective guidance and counselling for values, orientation and national development. *Unizik Journal of Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 3 (2), 11-25.
- Ekpenyong, V. O., Ebinyi, D. W. & Ushie, G. B. (2017). Gender equality and the empowerment of women for sustainable development in Nigeria. *Education for Today, Journal of Faculty of Education, University of Calabar, Calabar*, 13 (3), 10-17.
- Ekpenyong, V. O., Tawo, C. N. & Ibok, E. O. (2024). Digitalization and emerging issues in Adult Education for sustainable development in Nigeria. *Bayero Journal of Education in Africa*, 10 (3), 144-153.
- Esu, A. E. O. (2019). Education for Humanistic Values. In Ivowi, U. M. O. (Ed) *Education for Value*. Lagos: The CIBN Press Limited.



- Giannoukos, G., Besas, G., Garilopoulos, C. & Hioctour, V. (2015). The role of the educator in adult education. *Journal of Education and Learning* 9 (3), 237-240.
- Ibok, E. O., Aniashi, B. U., Aya, E. K. & Dennis, U. W. (2023). Re-cultivating academic integrity through continuing education for a corrupt free Nigerian society. *Unilorin Journal of Lifelong Education*, 7(2), 105 – 115.
- Kanu, I. A. (2018). African Bioethics in a world of change. *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, 1(2), 50-59.
- Lehner, D. A. & Kube, P. K. (2020). Why philosophical ethics in school: implications for education in technology and in general in ethics and education. New York: Tailore and Francis Group.
- Matthew, I. O & Obiesili, A. O. (2022). Ethics and values education: a panacea for sustainable development. *International Journal of Ethics and Values*, 3(6), 37 – 48.
- Mukherjee, M. S. (2022). Value re-orientation in secondary school education in Nigeria. *Knowledge Review*, 29(1), 12-24.
- Nwabuani, R. L. (2023). Values of science portrayed in out-of school context. Bangkok: Asia and the Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development.
- Nwosu, O. (2022). The dynamics of Nigerian educational philosophy: a critical analysis and synthesis. Onitsha: Osyora Nigeria Limited.
- Oluwagbohunmi, M. F. I. (2019). Value re-orientation for youths: an imperative for national development. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 3(5), 705-715.
- Robert, K. W., Parris, T. M & Leiserowitz A. A. (2015). What is Sustainable Development Goals? indicators, values, and practice. *Journal of Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*. 47 (3): 8–21.
- UNESCO (2022). 'Sustainable Development Report 3 August 2022. Retrieved 20 January 2023.
- United Nations General Assembly (2022). Report of the World Commission on environment and development: Our common future Archived 31 March 2022 at the way back Machine.