

## ADULT AND LIFELONG LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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### ABSTRACT

The concept "lifelong learning" gained prominence in educational discourse as a fundamental right of human being. The adults in the society are affected by the day-to-day economic trends. This challenge may prevent their survival if the educational system is not made profitable and appetitive sector to ensure the success of knowledge-based global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hence this paper is aimed at a lifelong learning approach to significantly shape the global marketing policies in the name of emancipation of the adults in the society. It examined the strategies for promoting lifelong learning in a contemporary society. However, this paper concludes that adults in a learning society can adequately survive the harsh economic measures being experienced in developing nations like Nigeria if lifelong learning is vigorously pursued and implemented to pave smooth way for a sustainable economic development.

**Keywords:** *Adult, Lifelong Learning, Economics, Sustainable Development.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Lifelong learning is the continuous building of skills and knowledge throughout the life of an individual. It occurs through experiences encountered in the course of a lifetime. These experiences could be formal (training, counseling, tutoring, mentorship, apprenticeship, higher education, etc) or informal (experience, situations, etc). Kaya (2014) defined lifelong learning as all learning activities undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and / or employment-related perspective. Lifelong learning is, therefore, about acquiring and updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications from the pre-school years to the post-retirement. It promotes the development of knowledge and competences that will enable each citizen to adapt to the knowledge-based society and actively participate in all spheres of social and economic life, taking more control of his or her future (EC, 2010).

Lifelong learning is voluntary and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. As such, it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but also competitiveness and employability. However, in Nigeria, individuals feel obliged to be a part of lifelong learning in order to gain new qualifications and so increase their chances of finding jobs when their opportunities of employment are limited.

The scale of current economic changes in Nigeria demand the use of non-formal education which relates to lifelong learning (Kaya, 2013). The reason is that non-formal education addresses concrete skills of its recipients and the objective is to enhance and improve performance in the particular skill. The governments around the world are starting to realize that in order to sustain the progress and improve a country's economy, the people have to be encouraged and trained in skills so as to be self-reliant to face any economic change.

Moreover, the focus on learning by the adult populace is crucial, because they constitute a great channel of changing the economic situation of the society. According to Obidiegwu (2013), adult learning gives the beneficiaries lifelong experiences needed to meet their societal needs as well as make them able to forecast the needs of the future. In fact, it could be said that lifelong learning promotes the development of knowledge and competencies that will make each citizen to adopt to the knowledge-based society and actively participate in all spheres of life, taking effective control of his or her future, in other words making him an active citizen of his society. For citizens to be active they need to be economically stable by being gainfully employed through the instrumentality of lifelong learning.

The economic trends in Nigeria has not been favoruable to the citizens, hence most of them live in abject poverty. For instance, in Nigeria, the number of unemployed youths is soaring and in a geometric progression about 10 million (World Fact Book, 2010) while the illiterates and unskilled workforce are the worse hits because their incompetence in both skills and knowledge cannot help them to secure any meaningful paid employment or earn a decent livelihood (Agusiobo, Obire & Nworie, 2017). Realizing this, adult and lifelong education will open up a range of new possibilities. It attempts to put forward new ideas on how to overcome poverty and illiteracy. This is because most jobs in Nigeria need workers who are willing and able to update their skills throughout their life times. There is need to prepare workers for lifelong learning in order to keep abreast of the technological changes in the world.

### **The Concept of Lifelong Learning**

Lifelong learning is the development of human potentials through a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetime and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstance and environments (Longworth & Davies, 1996).

Aitchison (2003) sees lifelong learning as a comprehensive and visionary concept which includes formal, non-formal and informal learning extended throughout the lifespan of an individual, to attain the fullest possible development in personal, social vocational and professional life.

The rationale for lifelong learning is based on the fact that men and women need to continue their education throughout life. Walters and Watters (2000) emphasized that there is much evidence which links people's ability to engage in lifelong learning with the potentials acquired in their initial education and with the diffuse learning environments in which they live. This means that the quality of human capital must be improved in order for individuals to be more productive for self and in the work place. This certainly would have a multiplier effect on the nations' ability to compete effectively in the global economy.

Thus lifelong learning policies and programmes are essential if adults are to keep abreast with dynamic of living and adapt to changing circumstances in their environment and discharge their responsibilities effectively. This, however, further stresses the importance of lifelong learning policies and programmes in the attainment of sustainable economic development.

### **Meaning of Sustainable Economic Development**

Sustainable development is an instant increase of welfare for all inhabitants, not compromising the lifelong in the nearest and further future. A rapid economic growth hardly ever is sustainable. Economic growth is an external notion, whereas development is a broader internal one by including the rise in standards of living and poverty reduction. Economic growth may result in an improvement in the standard of living related to a small proportion of the population while the majority of the population remains poor (Kruja, 2013). According to Kruja, it is how the economic growth is distributed amongst the population that determines the level of development.

Economic growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the development.

The overall goal of sustainable development is ending poverty, promoting prosperity and well being of human beings. This is only achievable through the integration of adult and lifelong education. Promoting adult and lifelong learning without the framework of the 2030 agenda implies a cross-sectional effort which recognizes the interdependence of learning and key concern around economic growth and development.

### **Lifelong Learning and Economic Development**

If the adults in the community are trained and converted to a potential workforce to meet with the market conditions, it will ensure that individuals are self-employed and can generate a living income capable of meeting their basic and other secondary needs.

Thus, lifelong learning provides opportunities for adults in communities to embrace learning for adults in communities to embrace learning and life endeavours. Okukpon (2005) maintained that lifelong learning will help to liberate man from conflictual situation and expose him to new experiences which will lead to his growth and development. It is pertinent to note that changes are rapidly occurring in the human society. These changes occur in areas such as technology and socio-economic world of work. Lifelong learning becomes a potent tool that can remedy the situation, as it equips an individual to work productivity, achieve job satisfaction, material well being and economic security (Okukpon, 2009). In addition, Hinzen (2003) emphasized that lifelong learning ensures that the learning needs of all youths and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes. This will ensure the improvement in the level of adult literacy especially for women and solves the problem of employability challenges.

Lifelong learning in recent time has been largely in terms of economic well being and employability to cope with the economic and technological challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Medel-Anonuevo, Ohsako & Mauch Cited in Ngurukwem, & Ede, 2017). Lifelong learning is no doubt a veritable tool for sustainable human development. The idea of human development grew out of global discussion on the link between economic growth and development during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the early 1960s economic growth had emerged as the leading indicator of national progress in many countries of the world. In the 1970s and 80s, the focus was on increasing the GDP of the nation, but emphasizes was laid on employment and provision of basic needs (Bullemkori & Akpana, 2017). Then human development approach focused on improving the living standards of the people rather than assuming that economic growth will automatically lead to increasing opportunities for all.

This is why Edwards and usher (2001) mention that lifelong learning can be converted into a form of an investment in human capital which will ensure the success of knowledge based global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The country today is confronted with poverty, illiteracy, globalization and socio-economic problems, etc. These challenges point to the need for knowledge-based economy and learning society. The citizens need not only to update their skills but they should be able to acquire new ones, not just to prosper in the modern society but more importantly for personal satisfaction (Figel, 2006).

### **Strategies for Promoting Lifelong Learning**

Lifelong learning opportunities have a valid means of assisting adults in acquiring and meeting their needs for socio-economic development. The following strategies advanced by Soni (2012) are relevant to sustaining lifelong learning in Nigeria.

- Recognizing all forms of learning, not just formal system but should include non-formal and informal educational system.
- Insight into the demand for learning in the knowledge-based skills, to include for instance the new information and communication technologies. There is the need for collaboration in policy development and implementation among a wide range of partners, including ministries other than education.
- Adequate resourcing, involving a substantial increase in public and private investment as it relates to learning. This does not only imply substantially increasing public budgets, but also ensuring the effective allocation of existing resources and encouraging new forms of investment.
- Facilitating access to learning opportunities by making them more visible, introducing new provisions and removing obstacles to access, for example through the creation of more local learning centres.
- Creating a learning culture by giving learning a higher profile, both in terms of image and by providing incentives in form of learning materials. The incentives should be for new literates and introducing more educative programmes on radio and television stations for the people to opt for learning.
- Reformulation of access and equity priorities in a lifelong content, by looking at the opportunities that are available to individuals across their life-cycle and in the different settings where learning can occur. To have a knowledge-based economics and societies, there should be less emphasis on certification in favour of practical skills learnt by participants in various lifelong learning centres.

## CONCLUSION

Lifelong learning is an important weapon to sustain the economic development of any nation. It is imperative in view of the current changes that are ongoing in the human society. These changes require the acquisition of new skills, values, knowledge and attitudes to enable individuals withstand the challenges of change. In view of this, lifelong learning is required to empower the youths and adults for job opportunity, employability and self-reliance. The effective implementation of lifelong learning programmes will pave way for career advancement, as the adults in the society can become a well productive organism in life.

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