

Social and Economic Challenges to Lifelong Learning in Nigeria

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Abstract

Education is a right for all in any nation. Education gives access to other basic human rights. Learning is an activity carried out by human beings and is a continuous process. The philosophy behind lifelong learning is that it is never too soon or too late for learning. Lifelong learning is attitudinal that is acquiring a mindset that one can and should be open to new ideas, decisions and skills. But lifelong learning in Nigeria is besieged by social and economic challenges. Some Nigerians feel they are too old to learn or that they have learnt enough in school and this attitude hinders the creation of a national culture of lifelong learners. The Nigerian educational system is deficient in providing a process that encourages lifelong learning.

1.1 Introduction

Education is a basic right and a key which gives access to other basic human rights such as health, housing, work and participation among others, while also making it possible to accomplish global, regional and local agendas for development (UNESCO). Education, therefore, has value to individuals which brings possibilities to people's lives. It brings about economic well being, enhances health, encourages self-reliance and entrepreneurship, and helps families build better lives and lift their children out of poverty.

Learning is part of human nature because learning is a continuous process. Naturally learning is thought of as something acquired in school but learning can take place in different places. Mazur (2008) avers that learning is acquiring knowledge or developing the ability to perform new behaviours. It is common to think of learning as something that takes place in school but much of human learning occurs outside the classroom and people continue to learn all through life. Children are taught basic academic subjects which they learn in school but they learn a great deal outside the classroom continuously. Mazur (2008) states that learning continues throughout our lives and affects almost everything we do. Adults learn new knowledge and skills throughout their lives. If older adults remain healthy, their learning ability generally does not decline with age. Learning, therefore, is for life.

2.1 Lifelong Learning

There are different meanings of lifelong education and lifelong learning. But according to Knapper and Cropley (2000),

The single crucial element in the notion of lifelong education is to be found in the word 'lifelong'. It embraces a set of guidelines for developing educational practice (education) in order to foster learning throughout life ('lifelong'). Lifelong education thus defines a number of organizational, administrative, methodological and procedural measures which accept the importance of promoting lifelong learning.

Continuing, they feel the basic idea behind the term 'lifelong learning' is that deliberate focused learning does and should occur throughout a person's lifetime. Lifelong learning is based on the philosophy that it is never too soon or too late for learning. Lifelong learning is the development of a mindset that one can and should be open to new ideas, decisions, skills or behaviours. Lifelong learning provides learning opportunities for people of all ages and in different contexts such as work place, at home and through leisure activities which are not formal like school and higher education. Lifelong education is a form of pedagogy achieved through distance learning or e-learning, continuing education or correspondence courses. Lifelong education includes postgraduate programmes, people who want to improve their qualifications, update their skills or retrain for a new line of work. Lifelong education is important because of acceleration of scientific and technological progress. The knowledge and skills acquired in primary, secondary and university education may not be sufficient for a professional career that will last many years. Lifelong learning faces the challenge of meeting the expanding educational needs and expectations of larger numbers of students from different background. New occupations and careers and the rapid transformation of others requires new knowledge and skills to perform them. The explosion in knowledge and technology also calls for lifelong learning. The change to an information society, economic restructuring, organizational reform and changes in the workplace and career patterns call for lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is advocated because of the cost of education in the formal system and the need to teach and learn effectively within constrained resources. Lifelong learning is for social inclusion, employability, active citizenship and personal fulfillment. Lifelong learning enables individuals to update and complement their knowledge, competences and skills throughout life. According to Fischer () the objective of lifelong learning is to fundamentally rethink learning, teaching and education for the information age in attempting to change mindset. It involves and engages learners of all ages in acquiring and applying knowledge and skills in the context of authentic, self-directed problems and it exploits the possibilities offered by new media. Druker, 1994 opines that creativity and innovation are considered essential capabilities for working smarter in knowledge societies. Thus an important challenge is how these capacities can be learned and practiced. An implicit assumption made is that self-directed and lifelong learning can influence the creativity and innovation potential of individuals, groups, organizations and countries (Dohmen, 1999).

2.2 Distance Education

Distance education has made major changes on how educators and students think about teaching and learning. Distance education now provides educational opportunity to population that could not be reached before by allowing students to learn in more convenient times. In distance education, people extend the period of their education from a few years of schooling to a lifelong learning process.

Distance education requires the use of methods of instruction that uses different communications technologies in teaching learners in different places. These communications technologies are not readily available in Nigeria because of their cost, maintenance and provision of other facilities such as electricity to go with them. Many Nigerians who would have benefited from distance education do not because they are illiterates in the use of computers and internet. Synchronous and asynchronous distance learning methods are difficult to use in Nigeria because there are no several telecommunications media linked together so that learners can benefit from the strengths of each one. Communications technologies are not efficient, not widely available and so no elementary or secondary school offers distance education programme.

In Open University programme, students receive instruction entirely at a distance. This method of education is valuable in developing countries because large number of students can be reached with few teachers. It also provides a cost-effective way of using limited academic resources. According to Kwache (2007) in Nigeria, if open and distance education is well supported by e-learning technology, it will provide accessibility, flexibility and collaborative work to both the urban and rural populace of Nigeria and Africa in general who might not have the privilege to attend conventional universities. But this type of education is not readily available in Nigeria because of the cost, man-power to man the technology for learning.

2.3 National Open University of Nigeria

Governments in Nigeria has consistently relied on education as a tool for national and personal development. Alhaji Shehu Shagari saw the ever growing demand for education by Nigerians which cannot be met by the traditional means of face-to-face classroom instructional delivery. Open and distance education was seen as a way out. The National Assembly then promulgated an Act to establish the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in July, 1983. In 1984, it was closed down by the Federal Military Government that overthrew the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. After many years of closure, there was still the need to provide education for all in the

country. The National Open University of Nigeria is meant to provide functional, cost effective, flexible learning for all who seek knowledge. Some of the major objectives of the National Open University of Nigeria are to ensure equity, access and equality of opportunities in education generally but specifically in university education; enhance Education For All and lifelong learning; entrench global learning culture and reduce cost, inconveniences and hassles to education and its delivery. Equal opportunity entails meeting the individual where he or she is and attending to his or her needs from there. The university helps individuals to achieve what they thought was not achievable before. Equal opportunity means that when you apply to NOUN, no matter your credentials the university is prepared to meet you there. The university also helps you gradually through courses, certificate and diploma programmes to get you up to the point of matriculation where and when you can actually begin your degree programmes.”

The National Open University of Nigeria concerns itself with preparing professional in various disciplines through the distance learning mode. It offers courses leading to the acquisition of certificates, diplomas to post graduate diplomas and degrees. It is designed to cater for the continuous educational development of professionals such as teachers, accountants, bankers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, politicians, self-employed, businessmen and businesswomen. The major difference between the conventional universities and NOUN is the mode of instruction. At NOUN, instruction is through the open and distance learning method. This means that the students are provided with a set of course materials to study and they are examined when they have completed them.

It is a more flexible approach to learning. Flexibility is the cornerstone of NOUN. It is flexible in terms of time and timing, programmes and programming, and all these without compromising quality. A student can learn in any place and at any time convenient to him/her. If a student misses a particular schedule, she/he can repeat the lectures to himself/herself over and over again at other periods. The students work and schedule of duties do not suffer because they are in the university. Studentship does not disrupt whatever else the student wants to do – paid employment, family life, or raising a home etc. rather it enhances them. A student can also engage in normal activities in his/her community, in the church or mosque and in the society without hindrances. These flexibilities require from the students more self organization, more self discipline and more dedication to work and studies.

At the National Open University of Nigeria, there is a way for everyone who has a will to obtain university education. NOUN is established to complement the public and private universities. It provides university education in a non-conventional way because there is no continuous face-to-face lectures as in the case of conventional universities. The students are allowed to carry on their full-time employment and carry their academic load in small bits as their capacity allows. But the student has to understand clearly that Open and Distance learning requires more reading on his/her own, able to study independently, able to utilize at a higher level the various learning to learn strategies and to be more self motivated than the students who are in conventional universities (Getting to know your University).

The distance learning in the Open University is meant to appeal to anyone who wants to work and learn at the same time. Distance learning in the NOUN is composite and comprehensive. It includes personal contacts and a combination of resources such as

- Regular contacts with tutor;
- Availability of course materials in print (study materials, textbooks, work-books etc).

- Course material on CR-ROM;
- Computer conferencing facilities;
- Audio and video cassettes;
- Networking opportunities with your classmates and peers.

- Websites for courses

- Television instruction using Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Educational Unit, State and Private broadcasting stations;

- Radio broadcasts using the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), state and private broadcasting units;

- Feedback regularly on tutor marked assignments and

- Periodic face-to-face contact sessions using tutorial facilities.

2.4 Objectives and Expected Outcomes of the National Open University of Nigeria

The National Open University aims at ensuring equity and equality of opportunities in education generally but specifically in university education; providing a wider access to education generally but specifically university education in Nigeria; enhancing education for all and lifelong learning; providing educational resources through intensive use of information and communication technologies ,to reduce cost, inconveniences and hassles of education delivery. It is also expected that the Open University will raise the literacy level of Nigeria; substantially increase access to university education; widen the catchments scope of beneficiaries of university education thus reaching the hitherto unreachable and ensuring that nobody interested in, and capable of having university education is left out; enhance and facilitate workplace training and professional development; meet the yearnings of Nigerians from university education and reduce pressure on university place in the conventional university.

2.5 Study Centers

Study Centers are the main center of student learning activities at the National Open University of Nigeria and where the Federal Government of Nigeria presence is articulated. There are 29 study centers spread across the breath of the country. The expectation is that all the state capitals will have a study centre of NOUN. The plan is to eventually establish a Study Centre in each Local Government of the federation.

2.6 Student Enrolment

Students admitted to the university is about 26,923 from its past two previous admission exercise (2004 – 2006). A breakdown of the figure is as follows:

Arts and Social Sciences	5,644
Business and Human Resource Management	6,726
Continuing Education and Workplace Training	1,530
Science and Technology	7,413
Education	2,937
Law	2,673
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Total	26,923

In 2007, the intake was about 20,000

2.7 Staffing

At the headquarters, the staff strength is about 600 comprising of management, academic, technologist, administrative and other support staff. The university has also taken over the former National Educational Technology Centre (NETC) Kaduna as the Kaduna campus of NOUN. It has about 53 staff who together with the facilities located at the site are being reformed, modernized and upgraded to perform the original and many other added functions of the centre. In addition the university has staff at the various Study Centres. Each Study Centre staff include one study centre manager, administrative officers, account officers, many instructional facilitators and at least two student counselors. The main function of the instructional and tutorial facilitators is the conduct of regular tutorial meetings and facilitation of instruction at the various Study Centres. They also assist with professional workshops, course development and design. They are also responsible for tutor marked assignments and assist with the conduct of examinations. Instructional Tutorial facilitators form an important segment of learner support services.

2.8 Fees

The National Open University of Nigeria does not charge tuition fees. The fees are meant to cover costs for courseware development, production and delivery. The intrinsic nature and value of each course determines what is charged. The courses are not charged uniformly. An undergraduate course has a fee that is lower than that charged for a postgraduate course. A one credit unit course is less costly than a two credit unit course.

Production of course materials, learning aids and other student support materials acquired or developed in-house are being centrally undertaken at the REPROAQ centre and delivered in various formats and through various channels to the study centers for onward distribution to the students. The choice of format and/or delivery channel is based on students' preferred learning styles and the facilities that can be accessed in the various locations.

The different delivery formats for NOUN include printed materials, audio tapes, CD ROMs and on-line multimedia interactive and non-interactive presentations. The different delivery channels for NOUN include physical transportation of hard copy materials (printed materials, audio and video tapes, CD ROMs by courier companies, NIPOST and in-house transport division), electronic transmission of materials in multimedia (voice, data, graphics, video), over fixed line (telephone or leased lines), terrestrial and VSAT wireless communication systems, television and radio broadcast of educational programmes.

Reprodaq headquarters is located in Lagos state but not fully operational yet. It is expected to be the central hub for the production, storage and distribution of learning materials in multiple media format. It will be an aggregation of educational resources for sharing and distribution purposes – Reprodaq will offer academic services, content authority, central multimedia content reposition/ Data Base, E-learning/ Web based learning solutions, learning management systems, user interface, communication tools (mail, chat, forums, instant messaging), secure internet access, access to the National Virtual library, data collection, display and analysis; directory services; testing and certification; network management. Also production and editing facilities will be installed at the Reprodaq headquarters to produce, convert and edit multimedia content for multi-channel delivery. Delivery platforms will include – line audio and video uniast, Multicast and Broadcast; video and audio on-demand; text and graphics; CD-ROMs; audio and video tapes and printed materials.

2.9 Course Development

Course development is an integral part of instructional design within the open and distance learning system. All the courses in the programme have been designed and developed in line with an approved curriculum to meet the educational needs of the target group. The course content is written by experts in the various areas to achieve specific objectives. The development of these materials is based on the course description prescribed for each course. Each study material consists of identified topics that make up the course outline. Study units are developed and written addressing these topics. Exercises which students can attempt to evaluate themselves are given. There are also tutor marked assignments which students will complete and submit for assessment. The study materials are passed through several editing processes to ensure quality both in content and language.

2.10 Social and Economic Challenges

Nigeria educational policy does not show a deep understanding of the complex and emerging needs of the 21st century work force. It has also not integrated the 21st century learning tools in the instructional process across all levels. The Nigerian education system in preparing its students to become effective and good citizens should provide infrastructure and reflect on the practices available in schools. In Nigeria, there is need for strong, autonomous, responsive and inclusive universities to provide research-based education and gargets for learning in order to meet the many challenges of a globalised world bedded with technological change. An out-of-school (market/mechanic village schools) programme in South Eastern States of Nigeria for Basic and Post Basic Education Curriculum Modules was prepared by Skills For Life's Seasons Educational and Health Center (SLSEHC), Awka funded by Education Trust Fund (ETF) under the boy child education intervention in South Eastern States of Nigeria and restructuring based on Nigerian Educational Research Development Center (NERDC) and UNICEF curricula.

The Executive Secretary of the Education Trust Fund, Mustapha Jaji, stated that the ETF Boy Child Education is a means of enhancing access to quality education and re-entry into relevant knowledge process, specially designed for the Boy-Child from the South East geopolitical zone who at one time or the other left or dropped out of the formal school system. This programme is a continuing programme for boys who could not complete their formal education. They are now made to learn in their communities as market and mechanic boys. The essence of this programme is to achieve the goal of Education For All (EFA) by the year 2015 as well as enhanced and improved livelihood. This is a sort of lifelong learning for children at secondary school level who did not have the opportunity

to get secondary education or to complete secondary education. They are taught the basic literacy and numeracy to help them become functional in the society.

Lifelong learning can only be facilitated by technology because teachers and educators need a research-based and funded learning. Research in itself is not done in isolation in a particular university. There is the need in Nigeria to collaborate with other teachers or educators or lecturers across the globe as it is a known fact that globalization play a key role in research. There is need for sustainable technologies to sustain research. Professional and senior citizens who wish to continue with lifelong learning can do so with the aid of technology as they cannot afford to revisit their universities and enroll in classroom lectures and examinations. E-learning then becomes a mode of learning for professionals who desire to upgrade on their job. Research and Development (R&D), an avenue of encouraging new innovations in technology and industrial designs in a form of collaboration between experts in industries and professors in the universities as a result of lifelong learning is facilitated by emerging technologies. Technology, therefore, provides a stable medium of harnessing human talent in life learning.

There are a number of social and economic challenges facing Nigeria as a nation which hinder the attainment of the objectives of lifelong learning. The educational system in Nigeria emphasizes the acquisition of certificates so learning is thought of as something that takes place in school but much of human learning occurs outside the classroom and people continue to learn throughout their lives. There is also high unemployment rate in Nigeria and high crime rates. The government also pays heavily for early retirement pensions because older people do not have the opportunity to learn to adapt to the many changes that affect their lives. Tax revenue is reduced because with early retirement taxes are not paid while healthcare cost becomes higher. Despite these social and economic challenges to lifelong learning in Nigeria, she has come a long way to start a distance learning university named the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and a few distance learning institutions. She has established and sustained internet connectivity in all the universities. There is also the establishment of forms of collaboration among educators and teachers in home universities and abroad.

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