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BUILDING A SKILLED AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETY THROUGH ADULT EDUCATION

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Abstract

In a world rapidly shifting towards digital economies, Nigerian youth face a unique paradox: high unemployment rates alongside expanding opportunities in the digital sector. This article investigates the behavioral drivers behind youth unemployment in Nigeria and their implications for sustainable participation in the digital economy. Key behavioral factors, such as skills mismatch, limited digital literacy, cultural preference for traditional career paths, and low entrepreneurial drive, are identified as major obstacles. These challenges are compounded by structural barriers, including inadequate digital infrastructure, educational system limitations, and restrictive policy frameworks, which further limit young people's ability to engage in digital work. This paper further highlights the importance of behavior-oriented approaches to address these barriers and enable Nigerian youth to thrive in tech-driven fields. The article advocates for a multi-pronged strategy encompassing digital skills development programs, educational reform, private sector involvement, and community-based initiatives to build both technical competencies and adaptive mindsets. The paper projects that sustainable participation in Nigeria's digital economy requires more than just skill acquisition; it demands a shift in attitudes, greater entrepreneurial ambition, and enhanced adaptability. This holistic approach offers a pathway to reducing youth unemployment and supporting economic growth in an era where digital readiness is key to resilience.

Keywords: adult, education, skill, society, inclusive

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Introduction

The nature of our society today requires skill development. With population explosion, economic hardship and high unemployment

rate, every individual needs to be engaged in meaningful economic activities. The society is driving towards skill development education. This can be clearly seen in the current changes

in curriculum development in Nigeria. Skill and entrepreneurial related subjects are made compulsory in Nigerian secondary schools. This is one of the ways the society can survive considering high rate of unemployment due to over dependence on white collar job and its limitations. Furthermore, it is a society with skilled and functional adults that can develop rapidly. This is because it is the adult citizens of a country that drive the economy. The workforce of any nation depends on the adults. This is the reason Okenwa & Adewole (2025) opined that adults who are the people that work in any country, should be educated and re-educated, trained and retrained in order to enhance their skills and expertise which determine the gross domestic product of any nation to be effective.

Generally, education including adult education should be encouraged in any country because it provides the means by which humans can develop themselves, their society and their environment. The educated person will be able to utilize the natural resources to develop the environment with a view to providing the material needs of the people. Adult education needs to be given a special place because adults are the ones that can contribute to the GDP of a country. It is worthy to note that education of which adult education is an important element, is a necessary instrument that can help a nation, solve social, economic and political problems, to a large extent. This is because adult education, especially non-formal form of adult education, which include, apprenticeship and vocational skill training, is a potent tool to building a skilled society.

In this vein, Omokhabi, (2024) considers adult education as one of the important instruments for achieving socio-economic development, eradication of poverty and attaining

sustainable development. Training through entrepreneurship can assist adults to take up new challenges new jobs or professions. This will improve their standards of living. For example, Efe (2014); Okenwa-Ojo and Yusuff, (2020) examined the role of entrepreneurship education in effectively serving as a panacea for unemployment, poverty reduction and national insecurity in both developed and developing nations. The paper found out entrepreneurship education is vital to the economic growth of any individual and nation and therefore concluded that entrepreneurship education should encouraged at all levels of education. Many attempts have also been made by UNESCO, the United Nations and other international organisations to show the importance of adult education in building a skilled society for socio-political and economic development.

The society is made up of different individuals with differences. Adult education, which is an all inclusive education is an antidote for an inclusive society. Adult education cuts across disciplines. It is universal and applies to everyone, irrespective of age and physical conditions. Adult education is an integral part of the right to education and lifelong learning, and comprises all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults (including those with special needs) participate in their societies and the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes, formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live, develop and enrich their capacities for living and working, both in their interests and those of their communities, organizations and societies (UNESCO Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education, 2015).

To show the importance of education and adult education, the United Nations Organisation declared in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that basic education is the right of man and should be free, therefore should be all inclusive (UN, 1948 in Kareem and Bankole, 2016 and Durku; 2021). In addition, as an attempt to make education free and all inclusive, the UN, in 2003-2012 and 2014-2015, inaugurated many special committees on education. It is to be noted that educated people are the key elements of development in every society. It is when people are developed that they will assist their country in developing in so many sectors. Hence, education including adult education makes people socialize and be productive, respectful of the law of the land and develop their health and that of the nation.

The Concept Adult Education

Adult education being a world-wide programme which is engaged by people of different backgrounds be it academic, socio-economic, political, cultural etc. has been defined in different ways by different scholars. People define it based on what prevails within their immediate environment i.e academic, home, work and so on, and what they have experienced in their lives. For example, in Nigeria people refer it as literacy education likewise in other developing countries where illiteracy level is high. Thus, this has affected its practice because it has focused so much on literacy education. However, the definition changes as the scope spreads. To Ugwu and Mbalisi (2016), adult education is a process whereby people who no longer school on a regular and full time basis (unless full-time programmes are especially designed for adults) undertake segmental and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information,

knowledge, undertakings or skills, appreciation and attitudes or for the purpose of identifying and solving personal or community problems.

However, adult education continues to spread its scope as changes happen in the society. Hence, Nzeneri (2010) defines it as “any education given to adults based on their social, political, cultural and economic needs or problems to enable them adjust fully to changes and challenges in their lives and society.” This infers that the kind of education given to the adults will depend on their personal needs. Ali (2024) stated that through adult education, people realize their social, economic, political and hidden potentials. Adult education is not only training and basic education but also involves inculcating all needed skills such as financial, technical, creative, managerial, intellectual, marketing, communication and technology know-how.

UNESCO (2010) stated that adult education is a general process of transmission of technical or vocational knowledge as well as skills, values and attitudes, all of which take place out of the formal education system with a view to remedy early education inadequacies of mature people or equipping them with the knowledge and actual elements required for self-fulfillment and active participation in the social, economic and political life of their societies. Another definition of adult education is that it is a practice in which adults engage in systematic and sustained learning activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills attitudes or values (Seya, 2005; Sarumi and Ojedeji, 2025).

Adult education involves people of all ages learning in a variety of contexts; in educational institutions, at work, at home, and through leisure activities. Adult education,

through its various interventional programmes, is structured on the philosophy of liberating people who hitherto have limited or no access to learning opportunities. According to UNESCO, (2011). Adult education is a fundamental human right ‘for the achievement of equity and inclusion, for alleviating poverty and for building equitable, tolerant, sustainable and knowledge-based societies. The fourth UNESCO international conference on Adult education held in Paris in 1985 perceived Adult education “as a means to achieve social justice and educational equality while its contribution to economic and social development was considered crucial (UNESC 1985, Knoll, 2014).

From the above perception, Adult education was linked with sustainable and equitable human development, skill development, job creation, income generation, democracy and the overall goals of social development agenda. Paris and other vital conferences held concerning Adult Education especially the Hamburg Declaration, the potential contribution of adult education to the creation of an informed and tolerant citizenry, provided policy guideline for economic and social development, the promotion of literacy and the alleviation of poverty to enhance socio-economic wellbeing of the society Knoll, 2014).

It empowers people to actively engage with social issues such as poverty, gender, intergenerational solidarity, social mobility, justice, equity, exclusion, violence, unemployment, environmental protection and climate change. It also helps people to lead a decent life, in terms of health, and well-being, culture, spirituality and in all other ways that contribute to personal development and dignity (2015 UNESCO Declaration).

The aim of Adult Education, as captured in the UNESCO, 2015 recommendation, include to:

1. equip people with the necessary capabilities to exercise and realize their rights and take control of their destinies,
2. promotes personal and professional development, thereby supporting more active engagement by adults with their societies, communities and environments ,
3. fosters sustainable and inclusive economic growth and decent work prospects of individuals, and
4. It is therefore a crucial tool in alleviating poverty, improving health care and well-being, contributing to sustainable learning societies.

Concept of Skill Development

Skill development refers to the process of identifying, improving, and applying abilities that enable individuals to perform specific tasks effectively. It involves acquiring new skills, refining existing ones, and adapting to technological and social changes in the workplace and society. The goal is to enhance productivity, employability, and personal growth. Skill development can enhance economic growth. Skilled workers increase efficiency and innovation, boosting productivity and competitiveness. Another importance of skill development is that it enhances chances of employability and social inclusion. Skill development prepares individuals for available job opportunities. It empowers disadvantaged groups and reduces poverty by creating pathways to decent work. It also fosters personal development. It builds confidence, creativity, and adaptability in a

rapidly changing world. Skills can be acquired through formal education (schools, vocational institutions, and universities), non-formal education (workshops, community programs, short courses, self-learning, apprenticeships, and on-the-job experience) and/or public-private partnership (collaboration between governments, industries, and training institutions).

Building a Skilled Society through Adult Education for Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria.

Adult Education has been cited as a key in reducing poverty levels around the world as it has the capacity to develop skilled adult who will be economically viable. European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) 2010, results showed that Adult Education has a role to play in nurturing the skills and knowledge necessary for both reducing the risk of poverty and also for providing the capacity to withstand poverty-inducing pressure. EAEA (2010) emphasized the empowering role that Adult learning and Education can have in times of crises, providing a stable community, a chance for reorientation, a safe place and social recognition.

Also, the United Kingdom (UK) inquiry into the future of lifelong learning, as reported by Emmanuel, Aghedo & Caroline (2018), concluded that participating in Adult learning and Education can help substantially to reduce poverty, through skill development, vocational training, enhancing employment prospects, improving health levels of poor people and giving better chances of acquiring the tools needed to run their own lives through socio-economic development drive. The report concluded that Adult Education should be a part of any approach to reduce poverty

through its various programmes such as skill and vocational training and other socio-economic development drives.

Furthermore, a considerable body of recent research has explored the relationship between adult education and well-being through empowerment initiatives like skill development and vocational training (Jenkins, 2011). For example, the centre for research on the wider benefits of learning Niki, Philip, Katerina Kedraka and Anna (2016) provided some evidence of effects on subjective well-being and links Adult Education to increases in self-confidence and self worth. They reported that the direct effects of Adult Education relevant to well-being are self-efficacy, confidence or the ability to create support systems such as vocational skill.

This is why UNESCO's member states, bi- and multilateral agencies, non-governmental and civil society organizations, social movements, and the private sector have been called upon to include adult education and learning in all development initiatives and social programmes as an essential contribution to economic prosperity, sustainable development, social cohesion and solidarity (Ali. 2024). This is a clear indication that Adult Education can, through building a skilled adult, efficiently address the socio-economic development challenges in Nigeria effectively when fully utilized by the Nigeria Government policy planners.

Place of Adult Education in Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria

The place of relevance of Adult Education in/ to socio-economic development in Nigeria could be established with reference to three (3) main elements namely, social change (involving individual or group changes in social status and function), mobility of labour

(due to improved access to quality education and acquisition of desirable skills and attitudes) and general socio-economic development (as a result of improve per capita income/Gross domestic product (GDP) and the concomitant reduction in poverty). The above can be explained in brief below:-

Adult Education and General Socio-Economic Development

In the technologically based global economy of the current 21st century, growing emphasis is being placed on the contribution made by people or what economists refer to as human capital, to economic growth and development. This situation is based on the theory that the contributions of individuals to economic growth depends on their human capital: that is the knowledge, skills competencies and other attributes that are relevant to economic activity Stephen, (2010). Contemporary definitions and measurement of literacy as a major driver of human capital have also expanded the concept to involve literacy skills of a country's population broadly articulated to include prose (capacity to read and comprehend written passages), document (ability to present/communicate personal thoughts and feeling in writing) and quantitative literacy (ability to calculate/compute in words and numerals). Consequently, developing the literacy skills and knowledge of labour force is considered a key strategy for promoting national economic growth.

This is in spite of the views of Nwachukwu & Jonny, (2016) on the problem of determining what exactly the contribution of education is ("the residual factor") to economic growth

when considered along with other growth factors.

This is in line with the global perception of Adult Education as a fundamental human right for alleviating poverty and for building equitable, tolerant, sustainable and knowledge-based societies, as well as the key to the twenty-first century and powerful concept for fostering sustainable development, for promoting democracy, justice, gender equity, and scientific, social and economic development, and for building a world in which violent conflict is replaced by dialogue and a culture of peace based on justice (UIL, 2016).

Concept of Inclusivity

Inclusivity refers to the practice or principle of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their background, identity, or abilities, have equal opportunities to participate fully in social, economic, educational, and cultural life. It emphasizes acceptance, respect, and the removal of barriers that prevent full participation of marginalized or underrepresented groups. At its core, inclusivity is about embracing diversity and ensuring that every person feels valued, respected, and supported. It goes beyond mere tolerance — it seeks active participation and representation of everyone, especially those who have been excluded.

Inclusivity can be applied in various contexts:

1. Educational inclusivity: Ensuring equal learning opportunities for all learners, including those with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds.
2. Workplace inclusivity: Creating environments where everyone,

regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, or physical condition, can thrive.

3. **Social inclusivity:** Promoting equality and access to social services, justice, and civic participation.
4. **Digital inclusivity:** Ensuring equal access to technology and information for all members of society.

Inclusivity has the capacity to promote:

1. **Equity:** Providing fair access to resources based on individual needs.
2. **Accessibility:** Removing physical, social, and digital barriers.
3. **Representation:** Ensuring diverse voices and perspectives are heard in decision-making.
4. **Respect and empathy:** Valuing each individual's uniqueness and dignity.
5. **Social cohesion** by fostering understanding and collaboration.
6. **Innovation and creativity** through diverse perspectives.
7. **Organizational and institutional performance** by drawing on the strengths of a diverse population.
8. **Sustainable development** by ensuring that no one is left behind.

Achieving Inclusive Society through Adult Education

In contemporary societies, inclusivity is recognized as a critical element for the overall well-being and sustainability of communities. It refers to the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups participate in society, particularly those disadvantaged in

some way. inclusivity is not merely about addressing economic inequalities but also about fostering engagement in civic, social, and cultural life. One of the most effective ways to promote inclusivity is through adult education, which equips individuals with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to engage fully in the society.

Moreover, adult education is essential in overcoming structural inequalities, particularly those related to race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status. Marginalized populations often face multiple barriers to accessing education, including financial constraints, limited availability of learning programs, and cultural or linguistic differences. Educational initiatives that specifically target these groups have been shown to improve their economic prospects and social integration. For example, literacy programs for immigrants not only improve their language skills but also enhance their ability to participate in civic life, access public services, and integrate into the workforce.

UNESCO (2019) defines inclusion in education as a process that helps overcome barriers that limit the presence, participation and achievement of learners. Inclusion as an integral part of lifelong learning reaffirms each individual's right to education as upheld in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is understood as a process concerned with; learning how to live with and from difference and placing a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement.

Considering that the society is dynamic, continuous learning is necessary for adaptation. To this end, adult education is seen as an important tool capable of tackling social

and economic inequality, reducing poverty, preparing global society for new paradigms of sustainable production and consumption, training skilled labour for competitive economics, creating the basis for a culture of peace and conviviality, establishing more harmonious relationships between human and natural environments, and developing the potential of all people (Ali, 2024).

This education aims at equipping the people with the necessary capabilities to exercise and realise their rights, while taking control of their destinies. By promoting personal and professional development, adult education is said to foster sustainable and inclusive economic growth for individuals. Identifying adult education in the above feature is also seen in terms of

combating discrimination in a system. This stems from the fact that every individual is unique, as such individual differences should be acknowledged in all learning activities to promote sense of belonging which is evident on boosting learner's morale in learning activities. Summarily, adult education is purported at preparing people for life and helping them to live more successfully (Olori, 2012).

It adopts a humanistic and holistic approach to learning in order to bring about change in attitudes or behaviours. Undoubtedly, one can rightly say that adult education is an important element in inclusive education and inclusiveness itself a significant purpose of adult education, thus, a symbiotic relationship exist between adult education and inclusivity in process and practice..

Conclusion

Adult education is a vital tool in building a skilled and inclusive society. Adult education,

over time has played this vital role. This emanates from the nature, scope, goals and objectives of adult education. For instance, all forms of vocational education and training which includes skill development and acquisition are integral part of adult education programmes. Adult education is also education for all adults irrespective of individual differences, economic or social background, age, sex, academic background, etc. This is the reason adult education is vital to national development as the workforce of any nation comprises of the adults who drives all sectors of the economy and ensures generational continuity of existence and skill development.

Suggestions

Based on the role of adult education in building a skilled and inclusive society, the following recommendations are made:

1. Adult education should be given a priority attention by government and other stakeholders as to foster inclusivity in all areas of the society
2. Adult education programmes, especially, non-formal adult education programmes should be leveraged to build a skilled society to foster national development
3. Every individual should leverage on the opportunities offered by adult education to acquire skills for self-reliance and economic sustainability
4. Adult education should be given the required legislative and executive backing at all levels of government to strengthen its operations and practices.

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