

Research Article

A Nigerian Perspective of Continuing Education and Knowledge Economy

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Abstract

Adult education programmes in both developed and developing nations usually include continuing education. The relationship between the two notions is that someone requires additional information, either inside or outside of school systems, in order to remain relevant wherever one is at any given time. The information, communication, and technology era brought in a knowledge economy that should normally support continuing education, nevertheless there are still obstructions that prevent people from learning. Although these hurdles are both personal and structural, there seems to be no justification for anyone to remain without information for the purpose of individual and group survival. Continuing education and knowledge economy are two concepts that have become popular in educational theory and practice but they are not combined as related concepts in literature. This is an attempt to clarify the concepts for both professional and practicing adult educators generally in African countries and particularly in Nigeria where policy documents for the practice of adult education sometimes deviate from the extant principles and theories. This paper used a conceptual analysis of terms and a systematic review of the available literature. It concludes that continuing education and the knowledge economy necessitate more access to learning that takes into account individual needs and requirements from organisations. This is as a result of the increased availability and application of knowledge in positively changing human conditions.

Keywords

Nigerian Perspective, Continuing Education, Knowledge Economy, and Adult Education

1. Introduction

There is cause to wonder about so many related but unclarified concepts in Adult Education. It is a discipline mostly misunderstood as learning when someone is spent out or learning that is restricted to those who did not have formal education in their earlier lives. Those related terms to adult education have deepened the misunderstanding of the discipline rather than strengthened it. In the efforts of professional adult educators to redefine the discipline in a society that seeks after overhyping of disciplines, they are also inundated

with allied concepts like lifelong learning, non – formal education, distance learning, higher education, further education and electronic learning. These terms are usually used interchangeably with adult education but they are not the same.

This paper takes interest in the ambiguities of the related terms to offer a systematic review of literature and analyse continuing education as it is associated with other concepts. It explains how it can be differentiated from those terms used synonymously with Adult Education. The question is: will the

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term continuing education still remain as a distinctive specialisation in Adult Education when there is a radical movement caused by the world of work and the emergence of information communication technology in the knowledge economy? From literature search there was little that shows the relatedness of continuing education and knowledge economy.

2. Policy Review of Adult and Continuing Education

Authors like Akinpelu [1] and Hussain, Alhassan and Kamba [6] have identified the problems that continuing education faced in developing countries. Continuing education lacks regulatory body to protect the interest of learners. This could be the reason the costs for such programmes keep increasing. The motive of setting up continuing education centres is purely profit – making while the education and human development motives are secondary. The planning is poor; the organisation is shoddy, and the resources (both human and financial) meager [1].

The problems of continuing education as highlighted above could be attributed to lack of clarity in policy documents on adult education which do not make the distinction among these terms or provide any form of regulation. So in practice, there are so many terms on bill boards, fliers, and electronic media being referred to as adult education. So, lay people are left to ask what is adult education?

One of the related terms used interchangeable with adult education is continuing education. A review of the extant literature on non – formal education points professionals to a direction. Adult education and continuing education are the most commonly used nomenclature of adult education in tertiary institutions and professional conferences organised in the discipline. For example, one of the foremost dictionaries in adult education -An International Dictionary of Adult and Continuing Education (IDACE) that was first published in 1990 can be referenced as an authority in the distinction of adult education from continuing education. One of the ways IDACE (1999) describes adult education is ‘any organised and sustained communication designed to bring about learning in adults, excluding education following directly after initial primary and secondary education, and excluding vocational education. The dictionary further refers to continuing education as ‘those learning opportunities which are taken up after the end of full time initial education. From these two descriptions, adult education and continuing education refer to education after initial education in the formal system. This means that both are characteristically non - formal in nature. Both adult education and continuing education are often organised ‘to respond to the learning needs of specific groups of people (Jarvis,1999).

The American Association of Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) founded in 1982 is another example of ef-

forts that put the two terms together. As the conference is called: adult and continuing education are part of the same activity whereby adults answer to the question who the conference is meant for and continuing justified the rationale and how it should be organised. AAACE is a ‘strong advocate for relevant public policy, legislation and social change initiatives which expand the depth and breadth of opportunities for the education of adults (Schmidt, 2013)

3. Concerns About Continuing Education

The concerns of professionals and practitioners about continuing can be classified into definitional, organisational, financial, implementation and evaluation, ethical - ideological and its clientele [1]. The earlier section under the policy review of adult and continuing education has raised the issues of organisational and financial problems of continuing education programmes in Nigeria and indeed in most developing countries. This section will concentrate on the ethical concerns of the field.

Since adult and continuing education is by its nature and by reputation, a field of activities dedicated to the marginalised, ‘there is an inevitable misdistribution of power, as between the sponsors/providers and the powerless clients, between those who have the knowledge/skill and those who have not, with the course in a vulnerable position, and open to abuse and manipulation by unscrupulous providers.

Professionals would ask what continuing education is. Where did it start from? Continuing from where to where? If it started from the womb what are the educational activities that were involved? If it started at home, what is its nature? The question from where to where would also attempt to give answer to what is the end of such education. In order to provide answers to these questions, there may be need to restrict continuing education to what takes place outside the school system. That means continuing education in the formal school system would only mean promotion from one class to another which would end after the highest level attainable. In Nigeria’s primary school, the continuing education stops at primary six or five as the class may be. At secondary school, it ends at the senior secondary school three. At the tertiary levels, it ends after four or more years as the programme stipulates.

Outside the school system, continuing education means an educational system for those who need upgrading after the compulsory or basic educational system put in place by authorised agencies of government. In Nigeria, for example, there is a compulsory basic education of 9 years in both primary and secondary school. So continuing education will be the education that remediates early school leavers or non-completers of the formal school system. This means, it is convenient to describe continuing education as provision of educational activity for those who feel they are in need of such for personal and organisational aim. This definition cannot be all embracing because there are some kinds of continuing education that does not fall within it. There will be need to

dwelling more on clarification of continuing education as a concept. Knowledge economy is of particular interest to this paper so emphasis will be on the professional continuing education programmes.

4. Continuing Education

This section focuses on answering the question: is continuing education an aim of education or a kind of education which will be looked at from a global perspective? Later in the paper there will be discussion on adult and continuing education in developing countries. Literature supports the diversity of views in its usage. In North American countries, post-secondary or university level education is referred to as continuing while in Europe it is called further education. Continuing education usually has the dimension of providing access to learners who would have to appear physically to write their examination.

Continuing education can be established to facilitate programmes that have wide range of learners by a department in a university or a college. Since certain occupations require certificates, job seekers are forced to go back to school but not many will be able to give up their employments. So continuing education provides for learners to enter schools that can make them cope with work as they study. This means that continuing education programmes are usually designed in such ways to make learners learn on their own with little or no interaction with instructors. Self-directed and lifelong learning become concretised in continuing education.

5. Continuing Education in Developing Countries

Developing countries in Africa, notably Nigeria, should broaden their continuing education scope of operations to include skill acquisition, empowerment programmes, recreational activities, and political awareness. These programmes are already available in various European and North American countries. Individuals can benefit greatly from the programmes, which can provide them with ongoing access to educational programmes that will improve their civic actions. SADC's regional framework for continuing professional development for teachers [14] can be used to other professionals, including counseling, social work, information experts, and educators outside of the school system.

6. Knowledge Economy

The two terms knowledge and economy have independent meanings but they have become associated by the growth in information system. Knowledge refers to information acquired through living or from a person who taught it. It is an understanding of a subject, event, person, thing and place.

Economy can mean a system of trade and industry by which the wealth of a country is made and used at local, national, and global levels. So knowledge economy implies that knowledge becomes the most important factor in production and consumption. That means it is the creation, use and application of ideas rather than physical abilities or transformation of raw materials in productive activities Omoregie [11]. Knowledge economy implies that the search for the truth should be a binding component of the society rather than the physical infrastructure of raw materials. This is because the 'the rapid expansion of knowledge and the increasing reliance on computerisation, big data analytics, and automation have changed the economy even of the developed world to one that is more dependent on intellectual capital and skills, and less dependent on the production process. Knowledge economy has been reported by Corporate Finance Institute CFI [3] as the main driver of the massive expansion and career advancement of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers in physical and biological sciences. Given the entrance of many professions into the ICT world this claim can be disputed.

There are four characteristics of knowledge economy as highlighted by Tamplin [15]. They are: systematic provision of incentives for the pursuit of knowledge and entrepreneurship; presence of educated and skilled labour force; engagement with information and communication technology (ICT); and an environment that is conducive for invention and progress that includes both the public and private sectors. Two of these characteristics are somewhat present in the tertiary education systems namely the educated labour force and the limited engagement with information and communication technology. There is need to improve on the institutional pursuit of knowledge and entrepreneurship. Also the environment in most of the tertiary institutions are not conducive for invention and progress that should involve the public and private sectors. Knowledge in the contemporary society needs to be applicable. For its application there is need for cooperation, collaboration and coordination of knowledge workers.

Adult and Continuing Education

General continuing education is comparable to adult education because courses that come under continuing education are intended only at the adult population Cleartax [4]. What constitute adult population in communities are people in the age bracket of 15 to 35? The word only in the reference could also be said to be restrictive in educational system that tends towards inclusiveness.

Continuing education is becoming popular among those who are taking up new jobs or wish to run their own ventures especially where they need licences for such operations. The licences at times depend on certificates for operations. Part of the concerns apart from those explained above under concerns of philosophers are the fact of proliferation and unguided operations of continuing education in Nigeria. Apart from the few well established governmental, agencies and large industrial continuing education schemes, the field is largely

dominated by private proprietors and entrepreneurs Akinpelu [1].

7. Continuing Education and Knowledge Economy

Knowledge economy creates a problem in the transition from the industrial economy to the new economy driven by technology. This problem can only be solved by providing and expanding accessible continuing education programmes both physically and virtually to make workers who lack requisite skills to be able to function in the society.

What has been discussed previously as twelve types of continuing education by Indeed Editorial Team [8] are useful as ways of promoting continuing education in a knowledge economy. They include: post-secondary degree programmes, professional certification, independent study, professional events, on the job training, volunteering, research, online courses, professional licence renewals, language learning,

extension courses and continuing education unit courses.

There are organisations and associations that have these components of continuing education but do not realise they are engaged in adult and continuing education programmes. So they are not well organised and they cannot appropriate maximally the benefits that accrue from it. So professional adult educators are not recruited to manage these activities since it is believed any educated persons can do it. The most embarrassing aspect of this development in a knowledge economy is that institutions that project continuing learning as their vision strip adult education departments in higher institutions of continuing education units that truly make them distinctively adult and continuing education departments.

Innovation both as a process and a product has been placed by Korres and Tsamadias [10] as an important components of knowledge economy. The organisations that are involved in the production and distribution of knowledge are educational and research institutions, development agencies and firms which serve as learning institutions. This idea is represented in the figure.

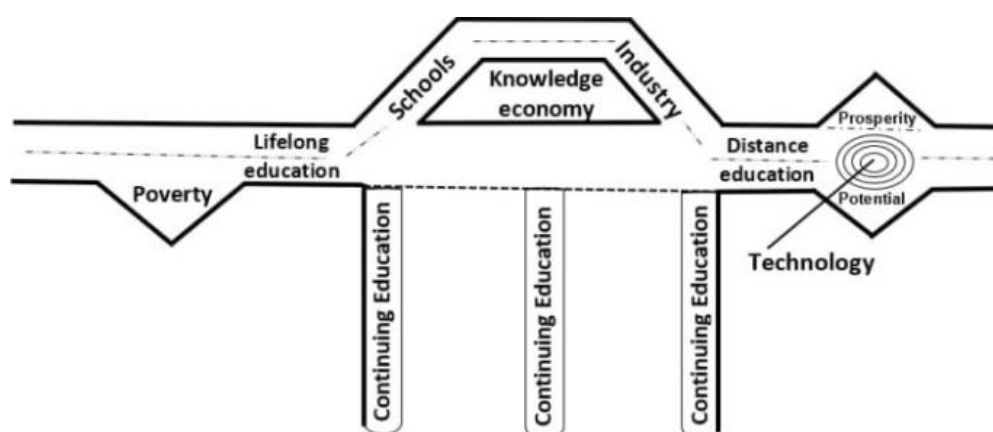


Figure 1. Continuing education and knowledge economy.

Continuing education in the figure is the foundation of knowledge economy that includes lifelong learning, schools, industry and distance education. They are components that can lead individuals and groups from poverty to prosperity. The figure validates the combinations lifelong education, distance education, higher education (adult education) and technologies by Cookson [2] and interpreted in the notion of learning society whereby Individuals and groups are to be encouraged and persuaded into taking part in learning activities so as to enhance their human, cultural, and social capital as the route to future employability, economic growth, mobility and cohesion Omoregie [12]. The central phenomenon of knowledge economy lies in the rate and range of change that human lives have been subjected to and the situation demands an education which is itself continuous, like change is the only one that makes sense. Human beings cannot any more envisage education as a finite thing, a preparation for life, it needs to be con-

ceptualised as part of life itself Wain, [16].

8. Continuing Education and Learning Society

Learning society refers to a community whose primary goals are continuous learning, active citizenship and social wellbeing. The strategies of achieving learning society are establishing continuing education programmes through the means highlighted by Davies [5]. Learning society can be created by deliberate interventions of professionals, online groups, spiritual organisations and conversational cafes in continuing education programmes. Individuals stories are resources for learning from other people. A lot of knowledge can be documented and shared by people's experiences. There is the need to promote cultural world views in teaching, research and community service of

knowledge workers. The skill of logical thinking should be made available to people especially those who have the role of informing the people. There is need to continue embracing diversity among individuals. The principles of inclusion, equality and respect should be promoted in a world that is becoming more divided by the day. The admonition for whole person learning will be useful in bringing about learning society through continuing education.

9. Conclusion

In the successful implementation of adult and continuing education programmes especially in Nigeria there is a great need for collaboration, cooperation and coordination of programmes for efficiency of the activities. Instead of pursuing the lofty goals of continuing education which to bring about a learning society by those involved in adult and continuing education programmes, what literature and practice point to are unbridled rivalry between competitors who are only after their profits at the detriment of learners and seekers of knowledge. Knowledge economy and continuing education efforts should not discriminate by subjects and courses rather it should focus more on the interest of the knowledge seekers. The bias for the promotion of Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) needs to be moderated by opening up more opportunities for learners following their interests.

10. Recommendation

All those involved in adult and continuing education activities and programmes have the need for associations that will bind them together. The meetings like those organised by AAACE in America and Nigerian National Council of Adult Education (NNCAE) in Nigeria should not be left to the whims and caprices of organisational leadership but rather government must show concern by supporting these organisations so as to influence their objectives for the citizens to continue their learning unabated. There should be more provision and deliberate planning for the development of the organisations by relevant agencies of government.

Adult education departments in universities should be by policy made to mount continuing education units for short time courses. This is suggesting what used to happen in Nigerian university adult education programmes in the past. The question is: why the policies no longer support what was so effective in improving the human capacity of the society?

Finally, adult and continuing education should be made by government policy an investment in individuals' education. Education of people benefits the society more than even the individuals because it makes people become better citizens and better it creates more conducive environments to live in. Knowledge economy places more demands on governments and organisations for achieving learning society as the goals of adult and continuing education.

Abbreviations

CFI: Corporate Finance Institute
 ICT: Information and Communication Technology
 STEM: Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics
 SADC: Southern Africa Development Community

Author Contributions

Christopher Omoregie is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Biography



Christopher Omoregie is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Adult Education, University of Eswatini, in the southern region of Africa. He was born on the 14th May 1967. He obtained BA Philosophy in 1995 at Saints Peter and Paul Seminary, M.Ed. Adult Education and Community Development in 2001.

He completed his PhD in philosophical foundations of Adult Education in 2011. After starting his academic career as an Assistant Lecturer at Adekunle Ajasin University in 2007, he joined University of Ibadan in September, 2012 as Lecturer II. He became Lecturer I in 2015 and Senior Lecturer in 2018. He teaches Philosophy of Adult Education at pre degree, undergraduate, post graduate and PhD levels. He has supervised 5 PhD in the Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan.

Research Field

Christopher Omoregie: Philosophical foundations of adult education