

21ST CENTURY LIFELONG LEARNING EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN A CHANGING WORLD

ADEKUNLE AdewaleAdedamola

*Department of Adult and Continuing Education
Faculty of Specialised and Professional Education
Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria
adewaleadekunle33@gmail.com
08034098190*

and

OLADIRAN, MusilimatAdebisi

*Department of Educational Foundation and Early Childhood Education
Faculty of Specialised and Professional Education
Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria
Adebisioladiran9@gmail.com
08034478152*

Abstract

In the 21st century, lifelong learning has emerged as a critical component of education, offering individuals the opportunity to continuously acquire knowledge and skills throughout their lives. This paper explores the challenges and prospects of lifelong learning education for sustainable development in a rapidly changing world. It delves into the evolving landscape of education, highlighting the need for continuous adaptation to meet the demands of a dynamic global landscape, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility and fostering a culture of continuous learning. On the other hand, the prospects lie in the potential of lifelong learning to empower individuals, enhance employability, and drive innovation and economic growth. The paper shed light on the critical role of lifelong learning in shaping a sustainable future amidst the complexities of the modern world. Supporting vocational education; promotion of sustainable development, investment in innovative financing for lifelong learning, amongst others were some of the recommendations made.

Keywords: Lifelong learning, Learning skill, Challenges, Prospect, Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Globally, the economic growth, development and progress of an economy are subject to investment in people, to the increased role of education lifelong learning and improving educational and employment policies. The importance of lifelong learning on the labour market is underlined in the increase of work efficiency. This

is so because individuals participating in lifelong learning adapt more easily to changes in the labour market and better face strong competition from the global economy. These advantages on individual level is consequential on the organization and the national level at large. This is so because “a well prepared people are always a long-term investment of society, becoming the support of economic growth and development” (Lonela, 2012: 4401).

Addressing strategic goals for sustainable development in the ever changing world, the educational level is one of the most prominent fields of discussion both as a target and as a factor for future development. The formulation of educational standards aiming at enhancing creativity and innovation is germane, and as well a key feature of emerging development goals respecting cultural differences and applying new technology development and targeted towards changes in educational systems, and aiming at providing – quality, efficiency, mobility, recognition, and competence. Lifelong learning skills have become a foundation for intrinsic learning activities as they foster a mixture of skills necessary in the changing world as it builds individuals and societies. According to (Loyens, Magda & Rikers, 2008:419), to strive for essential learning dimensions such as self-directed learning, collaborative learning, learning on-demand, and organizational learning.

Concept of Lifelong Learning

In pedagogical theory, lifelong learning is defined as an imperative and a prerequisite for individual development – that is, for an individual social emancipation, as well as for cultural and economic development of the society as a whole. (Demirel, M. 2009: 172). Lifelong learning is a process of developing knowledge, skills, and interests that provides opportunities for teaching and learning. It is not restricted or constrained to specific time, periods, years, certain organizations or institutions. Since, it is a natural tendency to improve personal capacities, it becomes a continuous process in which individuals retain and develop their life-based conduct, knowledge, and skills. The main aim of lifelong learning is to reinforce and improve the quality of an individual's life or to develop their personal potential to the utmost level (McGarrah, 2015:5).

In the educational sector, or in whatever situation, lifelong learning has served as a supportive process. This is because it stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire the knowledge, values, skills, and understanding they require throughout their lifetimes. In other words, the characteristic or desire for lifelong learning is based on the fact that it incorporates permanent, compassionate, stimulating attributes that amalgamates knowledge, values, and skills that span throughout a lifetime. Thus, it reinforces corporate confidence, creativity, and inclusiveness in all functional activities. As a matter of fact, it is asserted that lifelong learning entails a broad range of skills and professional attributes that reflect creativity, divergent and critical thinking, as well as teamwork, especially in heterogeneous

groups. This circumstance generates work autonomy that develops cognitive and interpersonal skills among individuals' social and civic competences. According to (Coşkun, Demirel, 2010a:2350) lifelong learning should be the core of learning process in this 21st century. According to him, it should follow the process itemized in table 1 below:

Table 1: Life-long learners at the core of the learning process

1	Life-long learners
2	plan their own learning
3	assess their own learning
4	are active rather than passive learners
5	learn in both formal and informal settings
6	learn from their peers, teachers, mentors etc.
7	integrate knowledge from different subject areas when required
8	use different learning strategies for different situations

Source: Coşkun, 2010.

As seen from the table 1 above, learners which are majorly adults, stands as the focus and as a result stands out in Box 1, while factors appearing in boxes 2-89 describes the characteristics and goals of lifelong learning.

Traits and Skills of Lifelong Learners

Lifelong learning is principally self-directed learning. The humanistic characterization of self-directed learning implies a sense of unique responsibility, self-actualization, and the acceptance of personal responsibility for one's own learning. The process involves taking certain initiative, with the support and collaboration of others. In other words, it reflects on constant interaction and social awareness that critically analyzes and diagnoses learning needs with specific reference to competencies (McGarrah, 2015:5).

Also, lifelong learning skills specifically require commitment and passion for knowledge. Thus, having access to a relevant knowledge-base is fundamental for sustaining permanent skills and confidence. When competency in a domain increases, the learner begins to develop his or her own domain-related goals, chooses and employs more adequate strategies, and shows an increasing ability to operate independently (Svetlana, 2016: 20). An expert does not only possess a vast amount of domain knowledge, but is also expected to contribute knowledge to the domain. Lifelong motivation comes from strong internal goals such as a desire for personal growth, capitalizing on existing knowledge to supplement professional competence, and ensuring accountability for practice renewal.

Lifelong learning skills and their attributes are derivable from experiences and social context and sometimes from the teachers, parents, or peers' modeling. For instance, when someone has to see knowledge as factual or objective truth, the adoption of a critical and constructive attitude toward learning will not be visible. Thus, the application of lifelong learning systematically aim at making learning

more provocative and constructive activity, in which prior knowledge plays an important role in facilitating further learning. A prerequisite for lifelong learning is to activate and make explicit prior concepts that are relevant to the topic and process of learning. Without this prerequisite, the learning will result in inert knowledge and lack transferability to other situations.

In addition, the attributes common among lifelong learners relate to an ability and willingness to be self-critical, self-correcting, and flexible in thinking and acting (Loyens, Magda, & Rikers, 2008:416). Lifelong learning is an attitudinal shift that means one can be open to new ideas, decisions, skills, or behaviors. Skills for lifelong learning relate to the need to acquire, process, and transfer knowledge. In this case, some of the processes or the curriculum is designed for adults, teachers, and students to determine what they need to learn and how to make and carry out relative learning plan (Albanese, 2000:732). Individuals need to know how to locate appropriate information, evaluate its quality, organize it, and use it effectively. This is because there is a need to be critical and creative thinkers, problem solvers, and decision makers for regular self-reflection in learning perspectives.

An abundance of lifelong learning skills supports the role of experiences and reflection in continuing education. It allows learners to uncover gaps in knowledge and skills that form the basis of learning goals. Thus, the steps to lifelong learning can be articulated as reflection, setting goals, assessing knowledge and skills, creating a learning plan, putting the plan into action, and evaluating and refocusing.

Lifelong Learning: A New Paradigm for Sustainable Development

Lifelong learning education is the concept of pursuing additional education and the development of further skills beyond an individual's formal or compulsory education. Lifelong learning is generally voluntary, and self-motivated based on a pursuit to learn more, gain new skills or support professional development. Lifelong learning can be formal or informal and takes place throughout an individual's life from cradle to grave (UNESCO, 2004:11). Lifelong learning, "education from cradle to grave," according to Demirel, Melak, 2009: 1713) is an holistic approach having as main targets, "generalizing the pre-school education both in quantity and quality, constituting a real learning basis in compulsory education, facilitating progression from school to business life, encouraging adults to learn, renewing the resources of the system and establishing consistency between parts of the system".

Lifelong learning comprises all phases of learning from pre-school to post retirement, and covers the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and information learning which means that learning is a diverse process adapted to the individuals and occurring at all times in all places providing not only individual needs, but

also community ones, in order to foster the continuous development and improvement of knowledge and skills needed for employment and personal fulfillment. It is a deliberate lifelong, life-wide, voluntary and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons that enhance active citizenship, social inclusion and personal development, competitiveness and employability. It focused learning throughout a person's lifetime and importantly connected to student-centered learning approaches. It is a core dimension of learning that leads to initiative and diagnosis of learning needs. Consequent upon this them, formulating appropriate learning goals, identifying of human and material resources for learning, choosing best alternative tools, implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating teaching and learning outcomes are fundamental.

Integrating life-long learning promotes career readiness in every sphere of human development. By implication then, it aims at designing knowledge, values and skills that provide for confidentiality and creativity (AACTE, 2010:21). Hence, the premise of lifelong learning relies on learning that has the characteristics of developing attitudes towards researches, independent study skills, learning strategies, as well as higher order thinking skills.

Lifelong learning, fundamentally, intends to recreate learning, teaching, and education for the information age. It is an attempt to change mind-sets, thus producing an emerging paradigm shift from the traditional aspect of knowledge to an informative age for sustainable development. In this case, it integrates and applies knowledge and skills in the context of authentic and problem-based learning perspectives. Learning flows from a variety of activities in respect of observing how other people function through discussion, looking up information, trying something for oneself and learning from trial and error, and reflecting on all the previous activities (Salim, Mahmood, & Ahmad, 2018:356). On this note, the mental activities reflect on four components: social interaction, processing verbal and other symbolic information, direct experience, and reflection. These have remained the categories in which lifelong learning skills are acquired.

Lifelong learning is a form of self-initiated education that is focused on personal development. While there is no standardized definition of lifelong learning, it has generally been taken to refer to the learning that occurs outside of a formal educational institute, such as a school, university, or corporate training. The emergent skills required for lifelong learning involve a shift from the traditional model of learning to the development of innovation skills. New technology and business models have prompted innovative thinkers and employees with a growth mindset. The development of innovation skills in the classroom has become the basic objective as a way to help equip students with the 21st century skills to succeed in the future. In knowledge-oriented societies, the inevitability of lifelong learning implies that circumstance and environment designate different objectives

and characteristics that define society's and individuals' current expectations. This therefore resulted in the generation of new ideas, new theories, new products, and new knowledge that must be fully integrated or internalized.

Furthermore, lifelong learning for sustainable development is a process that leads to an informed and involved citizenry having the creative problem solving skills, scientific and social literacy and commitment to engage in responsible individual and cooperative actions. These actions will help ensure an environmentally sound and economically prosperous future (UN United Nation Economic Commission definitions.html 28 June, 2006).

Lifelong learning for sustainable development is a dynamic concept that encompasses a new vision of education that seeks to empower people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating a sustainable future. It is about:

- Respect of value and preservation of the achievements of the past.
- Appreciate the wonders and the peoples of the earth
- Live in a world where all people have sufficient food for a healthy and productive life.
- Assess care for and restore the state of our planet.
- Create and enjoy a better safer, not just world.
- Be caring citizens who exercise their right and responsibilities locally, nationally and globally (UNESCO, 2004:11).

According to Osuji (2011:57) sustainable development emphasizes change from old sector-central ways of doing business to new approaches that evoke cross sectorial co-ordination and integration of environmental and social concerns into all development process. Some of the sustainable development goals is to ensure environmental sustainability, promote social equity and development; a global-partnership for development among developing nations and education is seen as a vehicle that will help to achieve all these, UNESCO (2008:93). Based on the premise that poverty cannot be eradicated without addressing the basic human rights, health, education, and security which are crucial to the attainment of sustainable economic development.

Lifelong learning contributes to education for sustainable development as it is a continuing process that promotes well-being on all the three levels of sustainable development, economic, social and environmental. The values and principles underpinning sustainable development should enable learners to identify problems and reflect on them critically and analytically as a means of addressing local and global challenges and of shaping a sustainable future (Quane, 2011:27).

According to (Chitiba, 2012:1443), sustainable development in the 21st century should be based upon table 1 below:

Table 2: The Four Pillars of Education in the Future.

Learning to know:	mastering learning tools rather than acquisition of structured knowledge
Learning to do:	equipping people for the types of work needed now and in the future including innovation and adaptation of learning to future work environments
Learning to live together, and with others:	peacefully resolving conflict, discovering other people and their cultures, fostering community capability, individual competence and capacity, economic resilience, and social inclusion
Learning to be:	education contributing to a personal development: mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality

Source: Chitiba, 2012.

Lifelong learning is an extension of traditional corporate learning and development approach; hence, it results in unique challenges as follows:

There is an increased responsibility for learners to discover and pursue learning opportunities once they move beyond formal education. Lifelong learning requires individuals to be active learners who have the skills to learn in a self-motivated and self-directed manner. Individuals must develop the motivation and capacity to learn independently early in life, and an inability to respond positively eventually results in inequality in knowledge and sustainability of development and growth. The state of the learner will definitely affect the level of lifelong learning skills. Every individual has a unique background with a set of challenges that must be taken into account. Their learning ability, mindset, engagement, and day-to-day emotional states play key roles in determining how effective learning opportunities can be for them (Stefan, 2019).

Learning comes in the form of the learner's mindset. Someone with a fixed mindset will typically believe that intelligence cannot be improved, and will lack the motivation to do so. The learner may have anxiety about learning in the academic sense and even see it as stress instead of self-improvement. Alternatively, learners with a growth mindset believe that intelligence is malleable and take a more positive and engaged approach to learning. In this case, such individuals are likely to be full of curiosity and see difficult challenges as exciting opportunities for growth.

As lifelong learning is not confined to traditional classroom settings, many of the learning opportunities will take place in an individual's own time which is sometimes difficult to create. This could also take place during an exchange, in the evenings, or during weekends in the case of travel and retreats. True lifelong learning happens at all times not only through classroom activities. Lifelong

learning requires consistency or reinforcement for retention of some experiences. In other words, consistency is one of the biggest challenges. This, of course, is the core part of lifelong learning. Unlike corporate training and structured learning, skills and traits such as self-motivation and time management are critical for consistency as much of the learning will be voluntary. For extracurricular learning, individuals are also giving up their free time, which is a sacrifice that some will struggle with (Stefan, 2019: 1944). There is also the fact that some may simply become bored or too challenged by the learning, which can also lead to drop-off rates. These elements negatively impact on all the stages of lifelong learning.

The difference between generations is a visible challenge. Older learners may be more inclined to classroom settings at set periods during work hours. They may be less open to learning outside of work due to family concerns and may be less willing to travel to conferences or retreats. Younger workers may be the opposite, as they have more time and may be more eager to advance their careers. There is also a difference in how generations use technology and different learning techniques. Young employees may be keener on video, animation, as opposed to textbooks or lectures. This situation has its inherent challenge to both adult and young learners.

The curriculum created for lifelong learning skills may generate a new challenge compared to traditional corporate learning in the form of who directs it. Besides, every individual may have a higher level perspective on determining which skills to practice to enhance internal curiosity, autonomy, and motivation. Furthermore, there may be skills and knowledge that either the teachers or students want to learn that is relevant specifically, but it is difficult to capture based on societal demands. Finding a balance here between what is to be learnt and what is not to be studied remains a vicious challenge.

However, the above barriers or challenges can be summarized and categorized into three main domains viz:

1. Structural Barriers
 - Lack of appropriate education or training opportunities, constraints of the benefit system.
2. Physical and Material Barriers
 - Costs of learning (Direct-fees and Indirect-transport, books, equipment, childcare)
 - Lack of time, information and geographical proximity (unavailability of higher education in rural/remote areas)
3. Attitudinal Barriers
 - Negative attitudes to learning
 - Lack of confidence
 - Lack of motivation.

Conclusion

Learning through life should appear in the centre as an important tool to help societies constantly move towards the achievements of the sustainable development. Development of lifelong learning programs is important because of the opportunities they provide for assuring employment, higher quality of life and social inclusion, as well as for economic growth and community development as a whole. Lifelong learning policies are needed because permanent trainings lead to acquisition of valuable skills providing competitive advantages of individuals on the labor market in conditions of globalization of economic and social life, fast technological changes and increase in the importance of knowledge in economy.

Discussing concrete measures of support in lifelong learning in the country, some common aims could be identified concerning also the national education and qualification system: improving communication and cooperation between state, educational institutions, business organizations and society, adaptation of training to labor market demand and improving training programs on different levels and types, motivation for lifelong learning and career development. Educational measures should be connected to labor market measures, social and fiscal policies in order to increase employment, labor efficiency and motivation for self-improvement.

Recommendations

- The administrator and designer of the curriculum should make teaching and learning more practical for lifelong learning skills.
- The teachers should be trained for the enhancement of creative learning activities in the class.
- The adult learners should be trained in a manner to incorporate knowledge, values, and skills that span a lifetime.
- The management of the educational system should provide necessary learning opportunities to recreate learning and reinforce learning exercises that help to personalize knowledge.
- Government should request for all authorities within the public and private sectors of the education and training to undertake a review of the extent to which existing policies and practices are consistent with the principles of lifelong learning and submit findings to identify priorities for action.
- Government should request employer and community groups, and other stakeholder groups to identify skills gaps in the labour market and unmet learning needs of disadvantaged groups.
- Support professional development and training programmes for key educational and training personnel to facilitate their efforts to develop strategies within the framework of lifelong learning for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

References

- Albanese, M. (2000). Problem-based learning: why curricula are likely to show little effect on knowledge and clinical skills, United States.
- American Association of Colleges for Teachers (2010). 21st Century Knowledge and Skills in Educator Preparation. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED519336.pdf>.
- Chitiba, C. A. (2012b). Lifelong learning challenges and opportunities for traditional universities. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 46, pp. 1943-1947.
- Coúkun, Y. D., Demirel, M. (2010a). Lifelong learning tendency scale: the study of validity and reliability. // *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 5, pp. 2343-2350.
- Demirel, M. (2009a). Lifelong learning and schools in the twenty-first century. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 1, pp 1709-1716.
- Encyclopedia (Third Edition 2010).
- Lonela, A. M. (2012a). The role of lifelong learning in the growth of employment and labour efficiency. // The case of Romania. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 46, pp. 4399-4403.
- Loyens, S. M., Magda, J., & Rikers, R. M. (2008). Self-directed learning in problem-based learning and its relationships with self-regulated learning. *Educational Psychology Review*, 20(4), 411-427.
- McGarrah, M.V. (2015). Lifelong learning skills for college and career readiness: considerations for education policy. The College and Career Readiness and Success Center at American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED570180.pdf>.
- Osuji, N.C. (2008). Managing education for lifelong education for poverty alleviation in Nigeria. In J.B. Babalola G.O. Akpa. pg. 5.
- Quane, A. (2011). Evolution of and perspective on lifelong learning. In Yang, J. Valdes-Cotera (eds.). *Conceptual evolution and policy developments in lifelong learning* UIL, Hamburg pp. 24-39.
- Salim, S. F. M. Y. S., Mahmood, M. F., & Ahmad, A. B. (2018). The Importance of Information Literacy to Support Lifelong Learning in Convergence Era. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 7(3), 352–362.
- Stefan, S. (2019). The Challenges of Corporate Lifelong Learning. Retrieved from: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/challenges-corporate-lifelong-learning-stefan-s%C3%B6llner> on 13/3/2022.
- Svetlana, U.; Lasma Belceraite; Velta, L., 2016. Life long learning as a value. *Academia.edu*. Retrieved from: <https://www.academia.edu> 13/3/2023.
- UNESCO (2004). From <http://www.unesco.org/education>.
- UNESCO (2008). Education and poverty eradication. Retrieved on 5 May, 2017 from <http://www.unesco.org/education/poverty>.