ADAPTING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING-DELIVERY APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA WITHIN THE NEW AGE

Elizabeth Aanuoluwapo Ajayi[1]
'Labayo Kolawole Kazeem[2]

ABSTRACT: In practice, adult basic education activities are educational activities that adults engage in systematically so they can gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values for self-sustenance to ensure self-improvement and national development. Achieving these requires an appropriate approach which is vital for the participation of learners to ensure transformational results. However, the plague of COVID-19 created a disorientating dilemma for facilitators around the world, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, with little or no alternatives to regular physical contact learning-delivery systems using digital learning approaches. This imposed paradigm shift has created the need for flexible, adaptable, and sustainable delivery of adult basic education in Nigeria, while we await full utilization of digital learning. An adaptable Transformative learning delivery model which uses a blend of both transformative learning and each-one-teach-one approaches is proposed to achieve the dual-aim of adult basic education. The proposed learning-delivery model to be implemented by adult educators in Nigeria as well as other developing countries will assist learners to become active citizens for self-improvement and national development. This model suggests that facilitators will utilize the full participation of learners through their conscious and concerted efforts towards learning. In addition, facilitating learning with this model will show continual effort to attain sustainability of adult basic education, even in the advent of national or global uncertainties like COVID-19.

Keywords: transformative learning, adult basic education, Nigeria

Adult learning and education (ALE) is a core component of lifelong learning which has always been at the forefront for the betterment of life for adult citizens. By definition, UNESCO (2015) stated ALE includes all forms of learning by adults to enrich their personal development and capacities for their self-interest as well as that of their communities, organizations, and societies. From this definition, it can be seen that all forms of ALE have dual aims that are woven around the ability of adult learners engaged in ALE to seek self-improvement for their nation's development. Ensuring this means education for adults must occur at the basic, intermediate, and advanced level. For the basic level where it is compared to the formal system of education, it can be identified as Adult Basic Education (ABE). Therefore, in the context of this study, ABE is the equivalent of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria that is basic and post literacy education.

ABE in Nigeria emphasizes functional literacy in line with the dual aim of self-improvement and national development. These types of ALE, as well as other types in developing countries like Nigeria, are often delivered at learning centers depicting the physical presence of learners, facilitator(s), and learning content. Nigeria's education

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[1] Department of Adult Education, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria. lizabeth.ajayi@gmail.com/elizabeth.ajayi@aaua.edu.ng

[2] 'Labayo Kolawole Kazeem: Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. kolakazeem@gmail.com

policy states that the objective of adult education is to provide functional literacy and education for youth and adults who never went to school or prematurely dropped out of school (NMEC, 2017). This means literacy helps beneficiaries to perform roles in the society effectively as a sure way of empowerment. However, sustaining the activities involved in ABE is the main crux in the plans for the actualization of sustainable development goal 4 (SDG 4) target 6 which is "by 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial portion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy" (UN, 2018, p. 28).

So far, collective efforts are being made by the government to address the sustainability of ABE for SDG 4, fighting emerging challenges of illiteracy and establishing a culture of lifelong learning. Efforts are in place such as funding of adult basic education, development of literacy campaigns, and implementation of policy guidelines, among others. Unfortunately, these efforts were hampered in early 2020 by the rage of the coronavirus (COVID-19), which started as a mysterious case of pneumonia in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 (Ebohon et al., 2021). The coronavirus gradually transformed into a respiratory global contagious pandemic, spreading throughout the world. This spread disrupted all aspects of life socially and economically. The sting of the pandemic was obvious in the educational sector as there was no treatment option for the virus. Therefore, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended simple personal hygiene practices such as frequent washing of the hands, use of alcohol-based sanitizers, covering of the mouth while sneezing and or coughing, disinfecting surfaces as well as keeping social distance as sufficient prevention to hinder the spread of the contagious virus (Guner et al., 2020). The WHO recommendations to stop the spread of the virus made it compulsory for all gatherings to be suspended including physical educational activities (Ebohon, et al., 2021).

According to Adelakun (2021), the effect of the closure of schools and other educational facilities was deeply felt with static educational activities from March to September 2020. Apena (2021) also stated that the sustainability of adult literacy programmes was hampered by the lack of physical classes and social distancing. The Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC), Prof. Akpama Simon Ibor noted that the advent of COVID-19 had frightened and embarrassed Nigeria by the compounding and multiplying the problems of adult and non-formal education in an unprecedented way (Erunke, 2021b). This effect was obvious since there was lack of our norms of physical contact at learning centers. These made facilitators begin questioning previously held assumptions about learning-delivery in ABE, as well as seek adequate delivery responses to meet learning needs.

ABE in Nigeria Pre COVID-19

From time immemorial, ABE has been the basis for ALE in Nigeria and that aided the conceptualization and early professionalization of adult education. Ajayi (2019) explained that the idea of ABE in Nigeria was a response to the pool of adult non-literates in the 11th century. It can be said that both Islam and Christianity successively started literacy for adults, primarily for them to be able to read, write and compute figures for the

sake of the scriptures. This made literacy a vehicle for involvement in social, cultural, political, and economic activities throughout one's lifetime (Kazeem, 1998). There had been constant efforts by government since colonial rule. Njoku (2010) noted that as a British West African territory, Nigeria's entire literacy campaigns were funded by the government. Since independence, there have been historic landmarks such as the establishment of the Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) in 1971; adult education units in ministries of Education since 1975; a chapter for adult education in the policy of education in 1977 (revised/reprinted in 1981, 1998, 2004, 2007, 2013, and 2014); a 10-year mass literacy campaign begun in 1982; establishment of NMEC in 1991; establishment of agencies of adult and non-formal education; establishment of the national center for adult education in Kano in 1991; publishing the policy guidelines for mass literacy, adult and non-formal education in 2017; and establishment of literacy by radio, among others (Chieke et al., 2017; NMEC, 2017).

The responsibility of running ABE (funding, curriculum content, duration and location) is distributed through three tiers of government (Federal, State, and Local) through the Federal Ministry of Education, NMEC, state agencies for mass education, and adult education departments at local government councils. Funding is primarily the task of the government with support from philanthropists and international development partners. The curriculum covers basic literacy, which includes 1) symbols in the language of the immediate environment to possess the ability to read, write and perform numeracy for daily activities and 2) post-literacy covering English, mathematics, social studies, tourism, health education and hygiene, life skills, citizenship education, computer education, home management, religious, moral and civic studies, basic science, and agriculture. The policy guidelines state that in actualizing this curriculum content, there is a requirement for a physical learning space with proximity to potential learners managed by qualified facilitators with at least 78 contact hours in 9-12 months and 18 months for basic and post-literacy respectively (NMEC, 2017).

In practice, most learning centers in Nigeria usually have at least one hour of contact per day, three days a week. The learning-delivery approaches often used include a synthetic approach involving identification of alphabets as the first step to basic literacy; an analytic approach involving starting literacy with reading of meaningful sentences; Each-One-Teach-One (EOTO) approach involving a literate person adopting or funding the literacy of another non-literate; group discussions involving learners being in groups each with a leader, discussing certain issues; demonstration involving teaching specific skills by presenting how something is being done; seminar presentations, wherein a resource person who is an expert or specialist in a field gives learners professional guidance and lessons. Aside from the fact that this requires maximum presence in a physical learning environment, these approaches have been faulted as pedagogical and less transformational for adult learners (Ajayi, 2019; Ajayi & Kazeem, 2020; Simeon-Fayomi et al., 2017). These approaches were difficult to maintain during the COVID-19 lockdown, hence the move to digital learning world-wide.

ABE During the COVID-19 Era

All around the world, to bridge the gap in learning during the COVID-19 lockdown, nations were forced to rethink the educational opportunities ABE offers and especially the mode of delivery. UNESCO (2020) noted that as a measure to curb the effect of COVID-19, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been used more than before to keep abreast of health information, stay in touch with families and relatives, as well as enhance home schooling. COVID-19 brought into the limelight and reinforced the benefit of digital literacy and exposed some countries' inadequacies for such learning. Most developed countries had a smoother learning transition to digital, while some developing countries had a slow movement or were static. Lotas (2021) noted that adult learning at some centers in the United States of America abruptly shifted from in-class teaching augmented by digital learning tools to a totally remote learning environment reliant on digital learning. In the United Kingdom, social media (Facebook and Twitter) were the initial digital means used by organized community workers and volunteers to assist those facing health, education, and economic challenges (Campbell, 2020). Blundell et al. (2020) also noted that in the UK, facilitators provided support through imaginative online teaching resources as well as one-on-one. In Canada, literacy lessons were provided through press conferences, online conferences, individualized phone calls, and even physical mail for adults who were not comfortable with new technologies (Brossard, 2020). Dang et al. (2021) explained that there was a low number of contact with teachers during the pandemic lockdown in sub-Saharan Africa, although there were avenues for contact through SMS, online applications, email, mail, telephone, WhatsApp, Facebook, and others.

Specifically, in Nigeria, remote learning and the use of ICT to keep ABE learners active in learning was the radio literacy programme. Erunke (2021a) explained that "Literacy by Radio" was resuscitated in seven states with support from NMEC by providing primers, facilitation guides, payment of airtime, facilitators' stipends for three months, and memory cards for storing recorded lessons. Although this was a good pursuit, sustainability was not assured. Achieving the expected result can be said to be minimal in view of epileptic electricity supply to listen to the broadcast especially in rural environments. A better achievement might have been attained like other developed countries if the country had high levels of digital skills. NMEC's executive secretary noted that even though we live in a global digital society, digital illiteracy has been preventing Nigerians from availing themselves mass digital information (Erunke, 2021b). Meanwhile, if facilitators were equipped with requisite knowledge and skills on how to maximally utilize digital learning tools and adults could actually learn to read and write by using digital tools, then the ABE process would be more flexible, efficient, and adequate. Erunke (2021b) noted that deploying digital tools for ABE is challenging in Nigeria.

The impact of this laxity was obvious in the participation and achievements of ABE during this new era compared to the preceding years. For instance, in Ondo State, there were 4,200 and 4,731 adult learners registered in 2018 and 2019, with 3,975 and 4,513 graduating in those years. In 2020 and 2021, 2,138 and 2,118 registered, with 1,678 and

1,631 graduated respectively (Ondo State Board for Adult, Vocational and Technical Education, 2021). This shows that the sustainability of ABE is shaking if the learning-delivery approaches are still largely dependent on three times a week contact without adequate digital skills, facilities, and tools to support and reduce physical contact. Although digital literacy for ABE can and must be attained, the transition to digital learning delivery might not be as fast as expected due to some factors such as political will, epileptic power supply, provision of disseminating tools, and erratic telecommunication networks, among others. Meanwhile, what alternative approach to teaching can minimize physical contact? If perhaps there is another outbreak to breach the flow of contact in this new age, what delivery approach can we use as a developing country to ensure the adult non-literates are not exempted from the learning process? What approach can be used to ensure that the disturbance of the new norm serves as a motivation and basis for learning?

### Integrated Transformative Learning-Delivery Approach to the Rescue

Transformative learning (TL) is key in the sustainability of ABE because of its potential to break away from residual habits and help open up new possibilities and ways of engaging. Learning in this context is self-actualization since learners come to the learning environment with prior knowledge that affects their present and future learning. Moran and Moloney (2022) commented that good facilitators recognize that learners come to the learning environment with prior knowledge and learning past, which may form a loophole to be filled by their present and future learning. That means transformative learning is an endlessly positive experience in the context of self-actualization. It is an approach to teaching and learning based on promoting change, with educators challenging learners to critically question and assess the reality of their deeply held assumptions about how they relate to the world and situations around them (Meyer, 2009). TL as an approach for teaching-learning, is a method that ensures lifelong learning, active and experiential learning, problem-based learning, collaborative and social learning, and empowerment and dialogue education. It is an articulation of the past, enhancing the present knowledge, skills, and abilities (Ajayi & Olatumile, 2018). The approach reflects how meaning is made, experiences are interpreted, with adults questioning, reflecting on, and conversing about these experiences in order to develop and grow.

Ajayi and Kazeem (2020) established a Transformative Learning Approach (TLA) model, which depicts a cyclic model for learning depicted in Figure 1.

Adapting this model for ABE in the new age means learners come to the learning environment to recount both their pleasant and unpleasant experiences emanating from the disorienting dilemma of both low literacy levels and challenges of COVID-19, which new knowledge may help rectify. Then dialogue and discussions with others experiencing or having experienced similar disorienting dilemmas based on relevant content will exist among learners with support from the facilitator. This means new knowledge will be developed, and learners may convert it to immediate implemented action for change, or they may engage in plans towards future actions. Then learners are expected to

continuously check and improve themselves and society through learning, unlearning, and re-learning based on the new knowledge that evolves in each learning section.

**Figure 1.** *New Paradigm of Transformative Learning Approach (Ajayi & Kazeem, 2020)*
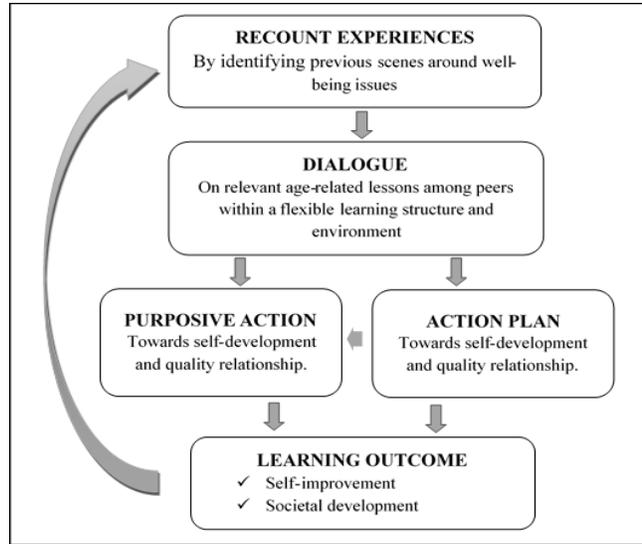
However, considering the fact that in the new age, we are trying to reduce the need for constant physical gathering in the absence of full digital literacy, this paradigm should be adapted to integrate the EOTO approach as a replacement for physical dialogue. Each–one-teach-one is an approach to literacy developed by Laubach in 1935. It is an approach wherein a literate person is meant to adopt and teach a non-literate person so they can also learn. According to Bello (2020), each-one-teach-one is a good and cost-effective learning delivery approach in adult education. This approach was pronounced for literacy campaigns in Nigeria with the intention of each literate adult funding the literacy or personally offering to teach a non-literate person. The concentration was on funding the literacy of non-literates. When economic crises happened in the country, the programme became moribund (Bello, 2020). However, this approach should be more of the literates becoming proxy facilitators for the non-literates.

Therefore, it is envisioned that if the approach is used as an integral part of another approach and not a standalone approach as seen in Figure 2, then better results might be achieved.

From Figure 2, it is assumed that the learning process for ABE will involve minimal contact, especially at the start of learning activity. It shows that there will be a recount of experiences and dialogue based on issues from inadequate basic education. For instance, the inability to read information appropriately on billboards might have hindered access to certain health information or the inability to continue learning during the lockdown period due to a lack of digital literacy. Learners with similar disorientating dilemmas may be grouped for discussion within the class during contact and related lessons identified based on the curriculum of the adult basic education. These identified lessons will be the ones implemented at the next stage.

Figure 2. *Adaptive Transformative Learning-Delivery Approach for Adult Basic Education*
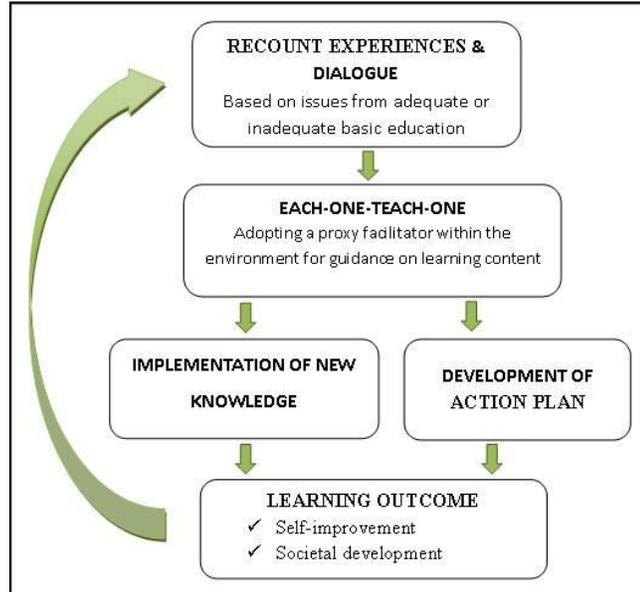
The next stage is for learners to identify their literate child or neighbor, or family member who is literate and who stays around or with them. This identified person will serve as a proxy facilitator to guide them through the lessons at home. Since the learner is to identify the person, the proxy facilitator may be more than one person based on the perceived interest or expertise. The proxy facilitator will enhance learning based on the identified lessons from the previous stage of the dialogue needed. This proxy facilitator, alongside the learner, will be in contact with the facilitator when issues arise from the lesson content. From the lessons learnt with the support of the proxy facilitator, learners either start to implement new lessons or plan toward implementation.

The next stage is for learners to develop new actions from the lessons or plan for the actions, and the implementation of the action will then lead to the dual aims of adult basic education, which are personal improvement and societal development. However, this is expected to lead to another dialogue and recount of experiences when the learners meet again with other learners and the main facilitator in the physical learning center. This cycle continues until the curriculum content is achieved within the space of a year as stipulated by NMEC National policy guideline.

SWOT Analysis of Adapted Transformative Learning-Delivery Approach Model

Denampo (2005) expressed that creatively facilitating for adults is an important strand of learning. As such, facilitating the integrated creative techniques of TLA and EOTO is a welcome development. However, realizing that there might not be a perfect model without setbacks, analyzing the Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) of this new model is important.

Strengths

Ajayi and Kazeem (2020) noted that to increase national development in Nigeria, the use of TLA is important for adults in order to ensure full participation in the experience, with an ultimate decision of improvement through personal plans. While Bello (2020) expressed that regardless of geographical factors, EOTO is an appropriate learning-delivery technique. Therefore, the main strength of this new model for a developing country without adequate facilities and strength for ICT blended learning is that it erodes the impediments of stagnant personal learning in situations of inability to go to physical learning centers. Hence, there is no need to go to physical learning centers more than once a week or once in a fortnight. Also, it is a known fact that African culture appreciates providing support for each other; therefore, the idea of being a proxy facilitator helping a family member or neighbor to gain literacy skills is like a rescue mission, which is a strength for this model. One of the perceived flaws of the EOTO may be a social disparity between learners and facilitators. The learners may have a sense of inferiority complex with high-status caliber of facilitators that may be assigned to them by literacy organizations. However, in this model, it is the learners that are the ones to decide who they think can work with effectively to achieve maximum learning. This has the tendency to eliminate or minimize inferiority complex or social disparity.

Weaknesses

To enhance facilitating, the proxy facilitators and learners may have to be in contact through a mobile phone with the main facilitator. This might be a weakness because the facilities to enhance such contact (phones, electricity to charge, erratic network, and even airtime) might impede reaching out when needed.

Opportunities

The resources needed for each stage of the model are readily available, that is, the physical space (already existing learning centers) for the initial contact to deliberate with other learners. The proxy facilitator is also readily available within reach of learners (neighbours or family members). The cost for implementation is relatively low when compared to moving to learning centers daily three times a week. It's also cost-effective since the proxy facilitator can be paid by the learners in cash.

Threats

The major threat may be a lack of commitment by the proxy facilitator, if expectations from the learners are not met. Also, the timing of the teaching-leaning at the second stage might not always be favourable for both or any of the proxy facilitators and learners.

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Conclusion

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With the new age of reduced physical contact and the new entrance of the Marburg virus in Ghana, which may become widespread like COVID-19, another lockdown may be

imminent. This means facilitating and sustaining ABE may be a challenge if our current physical contact approach for learning delivery is all we have in place. However, although it is acknowledged that digital learning may offer a better solution, as a developing country, Nigeria is not yet ready with all facilities in place to meet the task for digital learning. As such, a novel learning-delivery model, which is not dependent heavily on digital facilities, is needed. Though the TLA and EOTO integrated model is novel to Literacy programmes in Nigeria, it may have some challenges in its use. However, the merit of its use is more than the demerits, and it can ultimately enhance the mode of delivery of ABE in Nigeria.

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