

# ADULT EDUCATION AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ADAPTABILITY IN POST-COVID-19 ERA

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**ABSTRACT:** The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic revealed several inadequacies among Nigerian adults which include poor digital skills and survival techniques for adaptability in crisis. It was observed in the outbreak of the pandemic that most Nigerians lacked digital skills that was required for survival during the lockdown plus poor survival and coping techniques. The Nigerian adult must be well-rounded and fully educated for their role in developing the nation. Adult education focuses on continuous education and promotes human development and has become imperative to help promote digital skills and survival techniques among adults for adaptability in the event of a crisis. This paper discusses relevant concepts: adult education, human capital, adaptability, related literature in education, and digital literacy under three subheadings as well as proffered solutions on the way forward.

**Keywords:** adult education, human capital, adaptability

The transition from colonial rule to independence did not provide enough time to prepare the Nigerian adult with the necessary knowledge and skills to adapt to a new way, of life. (Ishaq, 2020). According to Safiya (2012), education was religious, political, and aimed at purifying the learner spiritually and was not relevant to individual needs and interest. American Historical Association (2022) opined that the Second World War ushered in a clamour for an end to slavery and colonialism that drove our colonial masters to begin preparing us for independence. Independence simply means freedom and that a society is considered mature enough to handle their affairs: building, growing, and driving their development to an achievable end without external pressures. Since independence, Nigerians have grappled with several national development plans and programmes, none of which resulted in national prosperity and stability. According to Deedam et al., (2019), the following development plans emerged after our independence in 1960:

- first - 1962-1968: This six-year plan focused on achieving an economic growth rate of 4% and increasing Nigerians' standard of living; however, was aborted by the Nigerian civil war in 1967.
- second -1970-74: This plan was enacted after the civil war. This plan focused on reconstructing, rehabilitating, and establishing Nigeria and its people. This was also termed as the "oil boom" period because Nigeria made huge sales from crude oil. Much as the plan achieved its objectives, a subsequent economic downturn/regression is traceable to financial indiscipline of then-governing elites.
- third -1975-1980: This long term and ambitious plan focused on increasing the nation's per capita income, creating employment, diversifying the economy, creating an indigenous economy, and balancing development through even income distribution and highly trained manpower. Although, this plan succeeded

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in growing the economy to 5%, it failed in achieving major results in those sectors that would have directly improved the standard of living for the poor, e.g., education, housing, health, and welfare. Leadership failed to allocate resources as stipulated in the plan, thus neglecting human capital development.

- Fourth 1981-85: This plan was a reaffirmation of the third development plan and basically serviced its existing debts and loans. Despite achievements, this plan failed to meet Nigerians' expectations.

It is important to state here that there was a vision 2010 plan, but it is not considered as a development plan in Nigeria since it was not implemented. Presently the Buhari-led administration is on an economic recovery and growth plan (ER&GP) and is yet to achieve the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs) and a 7% economic growth rate as anticipated (Turkur, 2017). Although, most Nigerians believe that the several development plans and programmes by government may not have helped us achieve much (Uche, 2019); we cannot deny that these plans helped us grow and developed to a certain degree. Furthermore, studies show that Nigeria is a growing nation with much anticipation at achieving self-sufficiency and first world standards requirements. Tutor2U Limited (2021), highlighted certain parameters examined when defining the development gap between nations. They are termed key indicators for growth and development. These are:

- The Gross National Product: The Gross National Product (GDP) is the sum total of all profits made or income earned by investments from the products of a country and profits made by nationals who are outside the nation within a period of one year. This excludes profits made by non-nationals within that nation.
- Life expectancy: The life expectancy encompasses the entire birth and death rates in a nation and how healthy the general population of a country is and the level of health care available to sustain life. The more healthy, strong and controlled birth through good health care services to match the GDP, the less deaths of infants and adults such that the working population is not depleted. This will grow the economy and improve a nation.
- Infant mortality (0-12 months): The infant mortality rate is often used as an indicator of development. This is measured as the number of infants dying before reaching one year per 1,000 live births. While good healthcare plays a major role in sustaining 1000 live births per year, preventing mortality is critical in growing a population and determining development. A growing population is key in sustaining the status-quo for development. The different age categories cannot be static but must keep growing from infants to children, adolescents, adults, and senior citizens; they all play a role in the development. A low birthrate will affect the adult and working population at some point and hinder development; hence, the reason some countries seek migrants.

- **Education (Literacy):** Education is also very important in development. Education leads to improved choices, which results in productivity and promotes sustainability. An uneducated or ignorant population cannot make informed choices in health, business, career, or leadership and will not make progress in the social, economic, and political spheres of society rather, the nation retrogresses.
- **Human Development Index:** Certain indices are examined and calculated into index values and matched among countries. The index value is termed as Human Development Index (HDI). The life expectancy, education, mean years of schooling, income, and the expected years of schooling index is computed. The higher a country's index, the higher their ranking on the human development index rating scale. This indicates that their population is more developed than others.

According to the World Bank (2022); United Nations Development Programme (2020), in terms of human development, Nigeria ranks 152nd among developing countries with a human development index of 0.539. Furthermore, on the level of internet access in schools, Nigeria ranks 120<sup>th</sup> in the world at 3.19 % (World Bank, 2017). This is a clear indication that the government of Nigeria and all stake holders in society have to put more efforts in human development and focus on improving our human capacities beginning with growing our human capital.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Government observed that most Nigerians were digitally illiterate and could not cope with challenges posed by the lock downs. They lacked coping skills, could not maximise available digital mediums as well as online information for their survival. With restricted movement and a complete shutdown of businesses, goods like food, water, and necessary services were only accessible through online transactions. The bulk of our uneducated adults, already shortchanged by illiteracy, could no longer participate and contribute their quota to development as they could no longer buy or sell. This revealed a gap in the quality of our net worth as a nation. Since human capital is a major determinant of economic growth (Spithoven 1991; Kenton 2022), human capital has become imperative to develop the human capital (comprising of Nigerian's adult population) through adult education to promote adaptability so they can cope better in the event of a similar crisis.

### **Education and Human Capital**

According to Idoko (2021), 76 million adult Nigerians are illiterates. It is worthy to note that irrespective of this figure, Nigeria's educational budget keeps diminishing from 8.4% in 2019, 6.5% in 2020, 5.7% in 2021 and 5.4% in 2022 (Iyabo, 2021; Kalifat, 2022). Human capital is a cumulative summation of the intangible net worth of a human. When the humans in society are educated, they are empowered with knowledge and skills boosting their capacities and competencies to function and participating in the growth and progress of their nation. According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary (2022), human capital is measured by the multiple skills, level of knowledge, experience, and educational qualification a human has acquired. Kenton (2022) summarises human

capital as one's economic asset, which determines the economic growth of a country. Human Capital Development (HCD), which seeks to promote learning and enhance human capacity for sustainable development is oftentimes misconstrued with Human Resource Development (HRD). The elements of HCD and HRD are similar but different. HCD is the total net worth of intangible capacities of all humans within a country, while HRD is focused on the growth level of this entire net worth (HCD) nationally. According to Spithoven (1991), HCD promotes economic growth because HCD helps grow the knowledge and skills of human capacities within a nation. The more skilled members of society are, the more productive they will become, resulting in direct returns on investment and increased economic productivity at large. The human capital index of Nigeria is 0.4 compared to Singapore ranked first at 0.9 (World Bank, 2022). When the human capital index of a country is low, a bulk of the population will live below the poverty line. HCD is measured and determined by the level of adult employability, accountability, professional knowledge and expertise, workers commitment and cooperation, skill, creativity and level of education (Han et al., 2008).

Education is a prerequisite for growth and development (King, 2011). According to Zuofa (2006) education helps humans to grow and adapt to their environment. Kingdom and Maekae (2013) opine that education is key in promoting socio-economic growth as it brings about knowledge, skills, character, and value that when inculcated into citizens, produces the necessary manpower for material productivity and development. Education promotes the quality of human capital in society. The value of enhancing human capital in post-COVID-19 era through education cannot be overlooked as it will aid development and promote adaptability. The human capital index gap between Nigeria and Singapore can only be bridged by increasing the level of knowledge, skills, character, and value of the Nigerian adult through education. With a high level of illiteracy and a youth illiteracy rate of 24.08 % (Knoema, 2018), education has become imperative to re-emphasize the value, need, and urgency and re-strategize for the ease of education access, especially for the digital illiterate. According to Victor and Asuka (2021), Nigeria requires an educated adult population to experience positive change. In this case, this change promotes the use of digital technology and skill for adaptability in post-COVID-19 era.

### **Digital Literacy for Adaptability in Post COVID-19 Era**

Romina and Elena (2022) define digital literacy as the ability to use digital technologies including hardware devices and software applications. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2022) for someone to be termed digitally literate, they should be competent using Information Communication Technology (ICT) to process information and engage with the media. Presently, it is almost impossible to communicate, socialise, work, search for employment and acquire a comprehensive education without being digitally literate. Romina and Elena however opine that globally, digital literacy has gone beyond being an indispensable tool to becoming a life skill since the economic forum adopted it as a 21<sup>st</sup> century toolkit.

Lain and Vashwanath (2021) reported that Nigerians coped poorly during the pandemic because most Nigerians lacked positive coping skills and their inability to cope

threatened human capital. For instance, financial transactions were carried out on-line via banking apps. Most youths worked and attended school from home. Most buying and selling were done through the internet via shopping apps. The Government directed only few institutions in society namely-education, financial and trading houses- that maximized such mediums to their advantage. Furthermore, only institutions with digitally literate personnel thrived. Even though health care providers and those in service delivery were exempted from the restrictions, the pandemic slowed productivity growth across the world (World Economic Forum, 2021) and the growth rate of our economy, which affected our Gross Domestic Product (World Economic Forum, 2022). The pandemic clearly revealed that we were poorly prepared to adapt to changes.

One may wonder what the difference is between first world countries and developing countries like Nigeria. In a first world country, a man goes to a filling station and manages the pumps. Unmonitored, fuel is bought and paid for at the required price. In a third world country like Nigeria, things are different. Even with the aid of a fuel attendant, a litre falls short in quantity and quality. The government stipulated price is never the same everywhere but rather varies from station to station. Evidently, the people lack the skill to fully function and maximise digital devices for adaptability and productivity. During COVID-19 lock downs, Victor (2022) observed that the use of digital skills was near impossible to do without. Digital skills helped the digitally literate and Government approved institutions to adapt to the challenges of the pandemic and the lockdowns for survival. As a means to tackle these challenges, educating the Nigerian adult is important as a means to maximise acquired knowledge to their advantage and adapt positively in the event of another lockdown.

Adaptability according to the Google English Dictionary (2022) is the quality of being able to adjust to new conditions and change to suit a different condition. Adaptability is a necessary quality because change in life is inevitable. Adaptability is a very important skill that is necessary for every adult Nigerian in this ever-changing world. Kaplan (2022) considers adaptability as a soft skill and as one's ability to adjust easily to changing circumstances. Adaptability is among the top five skills valued by employers. Kaplan, conceives adaptability as involving critical thinking, having a mindset of growth, being resilient and collaborative, and giving response to feed back.

According to Knowles (2005) an adult learner's experiences plays a major role in learning. Adults find it hard to adapt to the new especially when that new goes contrary to what they know and what their personal experience has taught them. Pandemic challenges were relatively new to everyone however, while some adapted to the changes and adapted quickly in tackling them, others did not.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, illiteracy will not be measured as the ability to read, write and compute; rather, it will be the ability to learn, unlearn and relearn. (Toffler, 1970 as cited in Kenyon, 2022). The need to develop human capital and develop the digital capacities of the Nigerian adult is critical. We must seek ways to prevent a recurrence of the situation where our economy became grounded because we failed to learn (digital literacy), unlearn (discard digital superstition), and relearn (adopt the use of digital

technology). The challenges we face in our country today are not only illiteracy but lacking the ability to unlearn and relearn.

### **Adult Education for the Promotion of Human Capital for Adaptability in Post-COVID-19 Era**

This discussion cannot present the concept of adult education as examined by numerous scholars however, for the purpose of this work, a few definitions will be considered. Bown and Tomori (1979) as cited in Nzeneri (2012, p. 9) define adult education as:

The entire body of organised educational process, whatever the content, level and methods, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in the schools, colleges or universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as an adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualification and bring about changes in their attitude or behaviour in a two-fold perspective of full-personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development.

This definition is broad and embraces adult education as it may appear in other societies. In Africa, adult education endeavours focus on literacy (Ihejirika, 2012), perhaps because a large number of the adult population is still illiterate. It is therefore important to examine adult education as conceived in Nigeria.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria's national Policy on Education (NPE) (2014) conceives adult education as the equivalent of basic education, which is given to adults outside the formal school system to promote mass literacy and provide functional basic education, remedial and lifelong education, in-service vocational and professional training for workers, and professionals in order to eradicate illiteracy. The 2004 national policy's definition is far different from the present definition that defines adult education as the process that helps develop adult citizens physically, mentally, morally, politically, socially, and technologically, enabling learner to function effectively in any environment. Apparently, the Nigerian government clearly understand that illiteracy has become a cancer that must be tackled aggressively. Nzeneri (2012) further defines adult education as any education given to adults based on their social, political, cultural, and economic needs, enabling them to adjust fully to changes and challenges in their lives and society. Zuofa (2007) conceives adult education as a process that enables adults to enlarge their experiences and interpret them as adults. Zuofa defines adult education as a type of education that encourages adults to enhance their capacities and potentials through formal, informal, and nonformal avenues based on their needs, equipping them with abilities to tackle life's challenges. Evident to note among these definitions is that adult education provides a forum for continuous improvement so that adults can adapt to changes and improve capacity in skills, knowledge, attitude, and behaviour thus adult education is also a vehicle to develop human capacities and promote lifelong learning.

A major objective of adult education, however, is to promote functional literacy. Functional literacy equips citizens with the ability to function such that they can read, write, compute, and understand what is written and read and is required to for survival. Adults cannot function, contribute their own part, and participate in their immediate environment if they lack skills to read, write, compute or understand the common language used as the lingua franca. According to Martinez-Alcalà (2021) the outbreak of the pandemic revealed that the adult population, especially older adults, lacked digital skills, preventing them from functioning and participating to sustain their survival. The outbreak of the pandemic also revealed a lack of competence in adults and the need to develop human capital. In order to tackle the challenges that arose from the lockdown and to better prepare the Nigerian adult for subsequent events, enforcing digital literacy as well as promoting coping skills and survival techniques among adults has become necessary.

Digital literacy will help promote adult participation in ICT and help adults remain informed with the bulk of information online bridging the divide between the digitally literate and those who are not thus, creating parity where everyone can operate at the same level. Nigerian adults need to develop digital skills so that they can: (1) learn how to use digital devices and boost their human competencies; (2) maximize various online applications and platforms; and (3) participate in the digital world to their advantage. Developing digital skills is important because adult participation in the digital space will promote economic growth. Educating the adults in society and developing digital competences such that they can utilise ICT may not be an easy feat. Omokhabi and Osu (2018) suggest that to improve learning potentials in adult education, improving the capacities of community libraries is key because they promote reading, stimulate the imagination, promote creativity, and raise the standard from just acquiring basic literacy skill to employing ICT for developing digital skills. Olajide et al., (2018) also suggests that the educational curriculum should be designed in relation to the manpower needs of Nigerians, emphasizing the need to update and tailor the adult education curriculum towards the 21st century economy.

Developing human capital of all Nigerian adults can begin with improving the content of the Nigeria's Adult Basic Education Programme. Digital literacy can be added to the curriculum at the basic, intermediate, and advanced levels if not already included with avenues for practice to boost digital skills. All stakeholders in society should place more emphasis on nonformal digital literacy programmes since most adults and youth primarily acquire digital skills non-formally. For instance, to promote already existing digital training programmes, training programmes for staff of public and government parastatals could be conducted to promote digital skills. Staff should be trained and retrained since Romine and Elena (2022) reported that acquiring digital skills occurs in different degrees: basic, advanced and intermediate levels.

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria as a nation faced several challenges before the pandemic's outbreak including literacy. The restrictions during the pandemic made digital literacy and its value more

evident aligning digital literacy with the critical need for basic literacy. Digital technology was one instrument that stood above the pandemic, however, most adults who were not digitally literate were excluded creating a gap in society. The world economic forum adopted digital literacy as an indispensable tool and a life skill; thus, digital skill must be among the human competencies of Nigeria's adult population. Adult education is the vehicle that can be a medium to help adults acquire digital skills leading to digital literacy. The following recommendations is hereby proffered: (1) digital literacy should be incorporated into the Adult Basic Education programme in Nigeria. (2) digital training programmes should be carried out and be top priority to management at all levels with training and retraining of worker and professional to promote digital skills and competencies.

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