

EXPANDING NOVEL ORBITS AND THE REACH OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION FOR HUMANIZATION

Prof. DUGJE KADIRI

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION AND EXTENSION SERVICES

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Abstract

The paper explores the topic, 'Expanding novel orbits and the reach of adult learning and education for humanization'. The introductory part gives the background and an exhaustive conceptual clarification of five (5) concepts that have also been listed as keywords. Major sub-topics discussed include: 'expanding novel orbits: emerging opportunities for adult learning and education' and 'the role of technology in expanding novel orbits for adult learning and education in Nigeria'. The paper identified benefits of novel orbits to include: a more flexible personalized and self-directed approach to learning; provision of opportunities for learners to develop new skills and competencies essential for career advancement and personal growth and affirmed that technological disruption, demographic shifts, and evolving workforce needs necessitates that Nigeria prioritizes innovative and inclusive approaches to adult learning and education. The paper advocates ten (10) practical strategies to expand novel orbits and the reach of adult learning and education for humanization in Nigeria. The strategies are: conduct needs assessment; develop a national strategy for adult learning and education; develop partnership; leverage technology; train facilitators; develop contextual content; allocate resources; promote awareness; establish community learning centers (CLCs), and monitoring and evaluation. The paper posits that investing adequate resources, collaboration among stakeholders, building capacity and leveraging technology, can unlock the potential of adult learning and education to drive humanization, social cohesion and sustainable development. The paper concluded that expanding novel orbits and the reach of adult learning and education is crucial in humanization and sustainable development in Nigeria.

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Introduction

In today's rapidly changing world, adult learning and education are crucial for personal and societal growth, addressing global challenges such as workforce development, social inequality, and climate change. As the world grapples with technological disruption, demographic shifts, and evolving workforce needs, it is essential to prioritize innovative and inclusive approaches to adult learning and education. This includes embracing learner centeredness, flexibility, and relevance as well as leveraging technology to expand access and enhance experiences. Moreover, adult learning and education must be responsive to the diverse needs of working professionals, entrepreneurs, immigrants, seniors, and individuals with disabilities, among others. By fostering a culture of lifelong learning, autonomy, and collaboration, we can unlock the full potential of adult learners, promoting personal growth, community engagement, and economic development.

This requires bold and forward thinking approaches, including competence-based progression, personalized learning pathways, and interdisciplinary partnerships. As we explore the frontiers of adult learning and education, we must prioritize inclusivity, equity and sustainability, ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Conceptual clarification

For Clarification purposes, the following concepts are defined within the context of this paper.

- a) **Adult Education:** This is the intentional and systematic efforts applied to support adults in acquiring new knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. It encompasses various forms of learning including: Basic-education, continuing education, vocational education, lifelong learning etc.
- b) **Adult Learning:** The processes, strategies and experiences through which adults acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. It encompasses various aspects, such as self-directed learning, experiential learning, informal learning, formal learning, technology enhanced learning.
- c) **Diverse needs:** In this paper, it refers to the varied requirements, preferences, and circumstances of adult learners. These needs may include: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or experiential learning preference (learning style), flexible schedule, accelerated, or self-paced learning (pace literacy skills), or support for non-native speakers (language and literacy). In the area of technology, this may include: familiarity with digital tools, platforms, and online learning (technological comfort). Other needs may also include: learning for personal enrichment, hobby, or creative pursuits (personal interests and motivations), aligning learning with career advancement, job requirements, or industry needs (career and professional goals).
- d) **Humanization:** Humanization in adult learning and education means an approach that prioritizes the well-being, dignity, and agency of adult learners. It involves creating a learning environment that: values learners' experiences and perspectives, fosters a sense of community and belonging, encourages autonomy and self-directed learning, supports emotional and social growth, promotes critical thinking and reflection, addresses power dynamics and social injustices, emphasizes empathy, compassion, and understanding .
- e) **Novel orbits:** In adult learning and education, "novel orbits" refers to widening the scope of adult education to innovative and unconventional pathways, approaches, and strategies that deviate from traditional methods in order to facilitate learning and skills acquisition: These novel orbits can include:
 1. **Unconventional learning spaces:** That is, utilizing non-traditional settings such as museums, parks, or community centers, community libraries, coffee shops to create immersive learning experiences.
 2. **Emerging Technologies:** Leveraging cutting-edge tools like AI, AR, VR, or block chain to enhance engagement and knowledge retention.
 3. **Interdisciplinary Approaches:** Combining diverse fields of study to foster holistic understanding and application.
 4. **Project-Based Learning:** Focusing on real-world problems and projects to develop practical skills and critical thinking.
 5. **Peer-to-Peer Learning:** Encouraging adults to share knowledge and experiences with each other, such as study groups, book clubs, social media groups, mentorship programs.
 6. **Community Engagement and Partnerships:** Collaborating with local organizations and stakeholders to enrich learning experiences.

Expanding Novel Orbits: Emerging Opportunities for Adult Learning and Education:

The traditional orbit of adult learning has been characterized by a linear-structured approach to education. However, this approach has limitations, particularly in today's rapidly changing society. The emergence of online learning platforms, social media and experiential education has created new opportunities for adult learning and education in Nigeria. This paper tries to explore the concept of "Novel Orbits" in adult learning and education which means the creation of new and innovative pathways to learn and acquire new skills. It involves pushing beyond traditional boundaries and exploring new approaches to adult education (Ayeni, 2017).

Expanding novel orbits in adult learning and education refers to the process of creating innovative opportunities that deviate from traditional teaching pathways. These emerging opportunities, which include entrepreneurial and innovative focused learning, mobile and just-in-time learning, lifelong and professional development learning, and social learning platforms and communities etc. are considered effective in the Nigerian context for reaching adult learners and enhancing their educational experience. These emerging opportunities offer a range of innovative approaches to adult learning, focusing on flexibility, engagement and practical application. These orbits are designed to accommodate the diverse needs and interest of adult learners including those who are re-entering the workforce, seeking to up their skill or reskill, or simply pursuing personal interest. Novel orbits can take many forms, such as online courses, webinars, podcasts, massive open online courses, (MOOCs), and experiential learning opportunities. These formats usually offer greater autonomy and flexibility for learners, who can choose when and how they engage with content. The approach also provides opportunities for social learning and peer- to- peer network, which can be particularly valuable for adults who may not have access to traditional educational institutions or formal training programs (Ayeni, 2019).

The benefits of novel orbits are numerous. For example, these orbits offer a more flexible personalized and self-directed approach to learning, which can be particularly appealing in today's fast-paced and rapidly changing world. Novel orbits also provide opportunities for learners to develop new skills and competencies, which can be essential for career advancement and personal growth. From an educational perspective, novel orbits offer a more effective way to engage adult learners who may have different learning styles and performances than traditional learners. Novel orbits also provide opportunities for educators to develop new skills and competencies in areas such as instructional design, online facilitation and digital literacy (Badejo, 2019).

Embracing expanded novel orbits in adult learning and education would enable Nigeria to create a more inclusive, effective and sustainable adult education system that addresses the diverse needs and interests of its adult learners.

The Role of Technology in Expanding Novel Orbits for Adult Learning and Education in Nigeria

In recent years Nigeria's education landscape has undergone significant transformations, driven in part by the increasing adaptation of technology. The proliferation of digital learning platforms and social media has created new avenues for adult learning and education, thereby enabling individuals to access educational resources and participate in online learning experience that were previously inaccessible.

This technological revolution has opened up fresh possibilities for expanding novel orbits in adult learning, making education more accessible, flexible and inclusive. This shift has far-reaching implications for the expansion of novel orbits for adult learning and education in Nigeria. Mobile learning platforms, in particular, have been instrumental in expanding the reach of adult learning in Nigeria. With over a hundred (100) million mobile phone users in Nigeria (Aminu, 2020), mobile devices have become a primary means of accessing information and learning resources. Mobile-based learning platforms, such as e-learning and WhatsApp- based learning initiatives have been successfully implemented in various settings, including formal and informal education institutions so as to provide adult learners with access to educational content, tutorials, and online courses (Babalola, 2020). This widespread adoption of mobile learning has:

1. Enhanced flexibility and convenience for adult learners;
2. Supported personalized learning experiences;
3. Facilitated real time feedback and assessment;
4. Encouraged collaboration and community building among learners.

Furthermore, the use of mobile technology has enabled the creation of personalized learning experiences that are tailored to individual needs and preferences. For instance, mobile apps like Dulingo and Cousera have been utilized to provide adult learners with language skills and professional development opportunities. These apps offer:

5. Adaptive learning pathways;
6. Bite-sized learning modules;
7. Real-time feedback and assessment;
8. Gamification and interactive elements.

Social media has emerged as a vital tool for promoting adult learning and education in Nigeria, offering platform for connection, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter (now X), and LinkedIn have enabled the creation of online community of practice, where adults can:

- i. Share knowledge, resources, and best practices;
- ii. Engage in online discussion,, webinars and podcasts;
- iii. Access educational content and resources;
- iv. Participate in online mentorship programs receiving guidance and support from experienced professionals (Brown, 2020).

The importance of technology in expanding adult learning and education in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Harnessing the power of mobile and social media would enable Nigeria to effectively handle the process of revolutionizing adult learning and education, and addressing the diverse needs and preferences of her adult learners' population. Leveraging these technologies can:

- Increase access to education for remote and underserved populations;
- Provide personalized and flexible learning experience;
- Facilitate knowledge sharing and community building;
- Enhance employability and economic opportunities.

By embracing technology, therefore, Nigeria can unlock the full potential of its adult learners' population, driving sustainable development, economic growth and social program.

Practical Strategies to Expand Novel Orbits and The Reach of Adult Learning and Education for Humanization

Nigeria is blessed with both human and material resources but faced with numerous challenges in its educational sector. One of such challenges is that majority of her population lack access to quality education and training opportunities. This has led to a significant gap in skills and knowledge of the workforce which hinders the country's economic growth and development. In this section an attempt has been made to proffer practical strategies that adult learning and education can be expanded to reach, improve accessibility, and make more impact on the lives of Nigerian adults.

Strategy 1: Conduct Needs Assessment: The first strategy to expand novel orbits and the reach of adult learning and education in Nigeria is to conduct needs assessment with the aim of identifying needs gap, goals and priorities of adult learners. This involves collection of data to identify and understand the needs of learners, know skills gaps and interests. In conducting such assessments various methods and techniques of data collection could be employed. Such techniques as surveys, focus group discussions and interviews. For example, in 2018, the Ghana Ministry of Education conducted Adult Education Needs Assessment using surveys, focus groups and interviews to identify adult learners' needs. Results obtained led to the development of a National Adult Education Policy in Ghana. Similarly, in 2018, the Nigerian National Board for Technical Education conducted a needs assessment of Adult skills using survey, focus groups and interviews to identify adult skills gaps. This effort resulted to the formation of the National Skills Development Programs in Nigeria. These instances suggest that by employing various data collection techniques like surveys, focus group discussions and interviews, it is possible to gather valuable insights for policy formulation, program development, and resource allocation, ultimately driving effective adult learning and education in Nigeria.

Strategy 2: Develop a National Strategy for Adult Learning and Education: This strategy involves creating a comprehensive national strategy that clearly spells out the vision, goals, objectives and priorities for adult learning and education in Nigeria. The strategy must be in alignment with Nigeria national development goals and priorities to address the key challenges and barriers to adult learning and education. In developing a national strategy for adult learning and education, various stakeholders play significant roles and responsibilities. For example,

- Government, Ministries and Agencies are to provide quality leadership and co-ordination, allocate resources, develop and implement policies and programs, monitor and evaluate progress.
- Adult Education and Learning Providers are responsible for providing expertise and experience, provide data and feedback on existing programs to assist in the development and implementation programs, and ensure quality and relevance.
- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs): These groups represent community needs and also provide expertise and resources, conduct advocacy and awareness raising, and monitor and evaluate progress.
- Employers and Industry Representatives: They provide practical insights into workforce needs and skills gaps, support workplace learning and training, offer resources and expertise, assist to develop industry relevant programs.

- Adult Learners and Community Representatives: Sharing experiences and needs, providing feedback on programs and services and ensuring that programs are responsive to community needs.
- Researchers and Academia: Are to provide research and data needed to form strategy, offer expertise on adult learning and education, support capacity building and professional development, and help monitor and evaluate progress.
- International Organizations and Development Partners: These are to provide technical assistance and support, share best practices and expertise, offer funding and resources, and assist in facilitating global cooperation and sharing.

These stakeholders should collaborate and work together to ensure a comprehensive and effective national strategy for adult learning and education in Nigeria.

Strategy 3: Develop Partnership: Developing partnership in adult learning and education, refers to the collaborative relationship between individuals, organizations, and stakeholders that support and facilitate adult learning and education, and this can include partnerships with adult learners and educators, community organizations, educational institutions, employers and training providers, government agencies and non – profit organizations.

Partnership in adult learning and education is very important as it fosters shared knowledge, expertise, and resources, addresses the unique needs and goals of adult learners. It connects learning to real life situations and practical applications, expands reach and opportunities for underserved populations and brings diverse perspectives and ideas in the learning process.

In adult learning and education, partners play significant roles and responsibilities in supporting and facilitating adult learning. Some of these roles and responsibilities may include: providing emotional support, offering encouragement and motivation, helping adult learners stay engaged and committed to their learning goals. Other roles and responsibilities include sharing resources, providing expertise and networks to enhance learning experience and ensuring access to new opportunities, helping adults to set and achieve goals, and celebrating their progress and success, helping adults build confidence in their abilities and develop a growth mindsets, and encouraging adults to take ownership of their learning, make informed decisions, and develop self-directed learning skills.

By filling these roles and responsibilities, partners can help create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that fosters adult learning and education.

Strategy 4: Leverage Technology: Leverage technology is a crucial strategy in adult learning and education because it expands access to learning opportunities, increases flexibilities and convenience, and enhances the overall learning experience. By harnessing the power of technology, adult educators can provide personalized learning pathways, facilitate remote learning, and connect learners with a global community of peers and resources. The following are the various ways that technology can be leveraged to support adult learning and education;

1. Online courses and degree programs;
2. Learning management system (LMS);
3. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR);
4. Artificial intelligence (AI) and adaptive learning;
5. Mobile learning and micro learning;

6. Online communities and discussion forums;
7. Digital resources and multimedia content.

With the wide spread use of mobile phones and internet connectivity, online platforms can be used to provide educational resources and training opportunities to adults across the country. This can be achieved through e-learning, online courses, and digital literacy programs. For instance, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has already taken advantage of technology to provide distance learning opportunities to adults. Similarly, online platforms such as Coursera, edX, and Udemy can be leveraged to provide access to quality educational resources (Chukwuemeka, 2020).

It is also important to partner with local organizations, community groups, and private entities to reach adults in underserved areas. This can be achieved through partnership with local NGOs, community-based organizations and private sector companies that have presence in rural areas. For example, the Nigeria Government can partner with local NGOs to provide adult literacy programs in rural areas. In the same manner, Private Sector Companies can provide training and capacity building programs for their employees, which can also benefit their families and communities. In addition, vocational training can be implemented to equip adults with skills that are in demand in the labor market. This can be achieved through partnership with industry partners, vocational training centers, and technical schools. For instance, the Nigerian Government can establish vocational training centers in each state capital that will provide training in skills such as carpentry, masonry, electrical work and plumbing. Similarly, industry partners can provide on-the-job training programs for their employees. (Daramola, 2018).

Furthermore, adult learning and education should be integrated with other sectors such as healthcare, agriculture and social services. For example, health education programs can be integrated with healthcare services to provide adults with knowledge on healthy living habit and disease prevention. Similarly, Agricultural extension services can be integrated with adult education programs to provide farmers with knowledge on modern farming techniques and best practices. Lifelong learning can also be promoted by providing opportunities for adults to continue their education throughout their life. This can be achieved through flexible learning programs that allow adults to balance their work and family responsibilities while pursuing their education. For example, universities can offer flexible learning programs that allow adults to take courses online at night while continuing their work during the daytime.

In addition, there is a need to promote literacy programs that focus on numeracy and literacy skills. This can be achieved through partnerships with local organization community groups, and private sector entities. For instance, the Nigerian Government can partner with NGOs to provide adult literacy programs in rural areas. Finally, there is a need to promote international cooperation and collaboration in adult learning and education. This can be achieved through partnership with international organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank. As a partner, UNESCO could provide technical assistance for developing Nigeria's adult learning and education system. (Ajayi, 2018).

Strategy 5: Train Facilitators: Strengthening the capacity of adult education facilitators in Nigeria is crucial for effective literacy skills and training because they play a vital role in empowering millions of adult learners to acquire essential skills and knowledge, thereby enhancing their socio-economic prospects and contributing to the country's human development goals.

According to UNESCO (2020), Nigeria has a literacy rate of 62%. Training facilitators can help to address this challenge. In the same vein, the World Bank Report (2020), reveals that 40% of adults in Nigeria lack access to education. Training facilitators is a strategy that can assist in reaching marginalized or underserved communities. Also, in its annual report, ITU (2020), indicates that 60% of adults in Nigeria lack access to digital technologies. As with other reports, training facilitators in technology integration can bridge the gap. According to UNESCO (2019), 70% of adults in Nigeria express interest in adult education programs. This implies that there is high demand for adult education. However, a study conducted by (Babalola, 2018) found that only 20% of the adult instructors in Nigeria receive regular training.

These examples and data are indicators that support the building of a strong case for training adult facilitators in Nigeria because these reports demonstrate the need, potential impact, and benefits of such initiatives. The goal of training adult facilitators is to ensure that they can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment, adapt to diverse learning needs and styles, and also use effective questioning and feedback techniques among adult learners.

Finally, by investing in instructor training, adult learning and education programs in Nigeria can enhance the quality of instruction, promote humanization and support the development of adult learners.

Strategy 6: Develop Contextualized Content: This is a crucial stage in adult learning and education and it is a process of connecting new information, skills or concepts of the adult learner's existing knowledge, experiences and environment. It involves presenting learning materials in a way that is relevant, meaningful, and relatable to the learner's life, making it easier for them to understand, apply and retain the information.

Contextualizing content can improve learner engagement and motivation, increase understanding and retention, which will ultimately enhance the quality of adult learning and education. It can also assist the learners to understand, see the value and purpose of what they are learning, thereby making education more meaningful, effective and impactful. Contextualized content also helps adult learners to see the practical application of what they are learning and making it more relevant to their lives. It also takes into account the learners prior experiences, cultural background and individual perspective, hence, making learning more inclusive and effective. This can be achieved through various methods such as using real life examples, case studies, storytelling and hand-on-activities

Strategy 7: Allocate Resources: Allocation of resources in adult education and learning, refers to assigning and managing of resources to support the planning, implementation and evaluation of adult learning programs and initiatives. Resources in adult learning include financial, human, physical, technological, time, and expertise.

Proper resource allocation ensures that adult learning programs have sufficient funding to operate effectively, qualified staff and instructors available to deliver quality programs, access to necessary facilities, equipment, and materials, appropriate technology to support learning and adequate time and expertise to plan, implement, and evaluate programs.

By carefully allocating adequate resources, adult learning and education programs can optimize their impact with efficiency and effectiveness.

Strategy 8: Promote Awareness: Promoting awareness in adult learning and education refers to the process of creating consciousness and understanding among adult learners about their own learning needs and goals, the benefits and opportunities of adult learning and education, available resources and support services, and about their potential and empowerment.

Awareness promotion among adult learners can be achieved for example, through sensitization campaigns (electronic, print and social media, community outreach etc.), orientation, guidance and counseling services, peer support groups and learning communities, celebrating successes and sharing testimonials. Adult learners need to be aware of their own learning needs and goals. The benefits and opportunities of adult learning and education, and the way to achieve these is by promoting awareness among them. Promoting awareness in adult learning and education program can increase engagement and participation, foster a culture of lifelong learning, and empower adult learners to take control of their learning.

Awareness promotion therefore, should be an ongoing process that should be integrated into all aspects of adult learning and education programs.

Strategy 9: Establish Community Learning Centers (CLCs): This refers to establishment of physical and virtual space that offers accessible, inclusive and flexible learning opportunities for adults, usually in their own local communities.

It is a process of providing a welcoming learning environment for adult learners that can offer diverse learning programs and resources. CLCs can be in various forms such as physical learning Centers (PLCs). Examples include community learning centers, community libraries etc., virtual platforms such as online forums, social media groups etc., mobile units which may include: buses, vans, etc. reaching remote areas. Community Learning Centers can be embedded programs within existing organizations. Such organizations as workplaces, mosque, churches etc. are ideal places where CLCs could be integrated. Establishing CLCs with focus on adult learning and education program can increase accessibility, responsiveness, community engagement and development of adult learners.

Strategy 10: Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): M&E is a crucial component of adult learning and education programs. It ensures that programs are effective, sufficient and impactful. M&E involves regular collection of data on program inputs, activities, and outputs to monitor progress (tracking). It also involves analyzing data to evaluate program performance, identify areas that require improvement, and major impact (assessing). The findings of M&E can be used to inform program design, implementation and scaling while ensuring continuous improvement. Effective M&E in adult learning and education ensures transparency and accountability to stakeholders including funders, learners and communities. It also increases impact by ensuring programs contribute to humanization, social cohesion, and sustainable development, and ultimately improving lives. M&E also support advocacy by providing evidence to advocate for policy change, resource allocation, and support for adult learning and education. M&E activities in adult learning and education may include identification of target audience needs and gaps, establishing pre-program data for comparison, tracking program implementation and progress, assessing program impact and effectiveness, and finally evaluating long term program effects.

By integrating M&E into adult learning and education programs, stakeholders can ensure that initiatives are effective, efficient, and truly transformative, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and sustainable society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, expanding novel orbits and the reach of adult learning and education is crucial in humanization and sustainable development in Nigeria. By investing adequate resources, collaboration among stakeholders, building capacity and leveraging technology, we can unlock the potential of adult learning and education to drive humanization, social cohesion and sustainable development. This can lead to a more skilled workforce, increased economic growth and improved social outcomes in transforming Nigeria's future. Let us join forces to ensure that every individual has access to quality adult learning and education, empowering adult learners to reach their full potential and building a brighter future for all.

I would finally conclude with a memorable quote from Nelson Mandela which states that: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (Mandela 1994). After all, "Learning is the only thing the mind never exhausts, never fears, and never loses" Leonardo Da Vinci. By prioritizing adult learning and education, we can empower individuals and communities to drive positive change in Nigeria. Let us harness the power of learning to build a brighter future for Nigeria.

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