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**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF ADULT EDUCATION IN THE 5TH
INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: LEVERAGING ON INCLUSIVENESS AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This paper on challenges and opportunities of adult education in the 5th Industrial Revolution (5IR): leveraging on inclusiveness and sustainable development in Nigeria has the following objectives: to find out challenges and opportunities in the 5IR and how inclusive adult education programmes and activities could improve and sustain development in Nigeria. The study employed a secondary source of methodology and contended that challenges and opportunities of adult education in the 5IR are inevitable, but if well managed, could enhance national sustainable development. Findings revealed that adult education in the 5IR is faced with such challenges as poor funding, inadequate facilitators or change agents, mismanagement and corruption, poor perception and awareness by the public, lack of supervision and monitoring among others while such opportunities like sustained lifelong education and learning, empowerment of citizens, employment, and skill acquisition could be achieved through inclusive adult education programmes and activities to enhance and improve national sustainable development in the country. It was discovered that inclusive adult education programmes could eliminate gender disparity, religious and cultural beliefs, and promote citizens' participation and involvement for national development. Therefore, the study recommends, among others, that the government should initiate policies that can promote inclusive education and community engagement for enhanced sustainable development in the country.

Keywords: Challenges and Opportunities, Adult Education, 5th Industrial Revolution, Inclusiveness, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Education is a systematic means through which individuals acquire knowledge, experience, skills and participate actively in the developmental processes of their community or country. It makes an individual civilized, refined, cultured and enlightened. It transforms individuals and enhances adults to be abreast with challenges and changes in the society. It is on this premise that the Federal Government of Nigeria (2014) sees education as the bedrock of national development. Owede (2022) in his own submission believes that education is a process of gaining or imparting knowledge that aide in building a proficient personality, ultimately improving the quality of life and enhances sustainable development and community well-being. It is a vehicle for social mobilization, freedom from poverty and slavery, sustainable community and economic development which make it imperative for adult populace to be exposed to some basic education that will enable them not only to communicate in the environment but contribute effectively in sustainable community development (Dimkpa, 2023). It is on this part that adult education as a key component of education will promote, enhance, and project adults towards 5th Industrial Revolution.

The advent of the 5th Industrial Revolution (5IR) is tailored towards transforming the world at unprecedented rate of development, bringing about changes in the way we live, work, interact and learn. The 5IR is hinged on the fusion of technological, physical, and biological parameter which presents both challenges and opportunities for adult learning and education. As the world becomes a global village, it becomes imperative that adult learners must be abreast with new technologies, acquire new skills and develop competences that will enable them thrive in a rapidly changing world. Information Communication and Technology is a key instrument for transmitting

knowledge, skills and information that promotes inclusiveness of adult citizens to participate and engage in sustainable development (Okafor 2024).

Adult education has being a critical component of lifelong learning and development which plays a significant role in personal and professional development particularly in regions facing educational and socio-economic challenges. Asojo (2017) opines that adult education enables individuals to become more useful to their community socially, economically, morally and politically. It plays a significant role in addressing the challenges and enhancing opportunities which is created by the 5th Industrial Revolution. UNESCO (2019) stated that adult education is essentially for promoting sustainable development, reducing inequality, and fostering inclusive growth and development. Nonetheless, adult education programmes and activities encounter challenges in responding to the demands of 5IR such like the need for continuous skill upgrading and development, communication and digital inclusion, and ensuring inclusive and knowledge accessibility (Kyndt & Baert, 2015).

It therefore becomes imperative for 5IR to collaborate with adult education to leverage on inclusiveness and sustainable development. In fact, digital technologies and communication can increase access to education, improve learning outcome and enhance overall quality of education (Zawaki-Richter & Latchem, 2018). It is in this circumstance that UNESCO (2015) insists that adult education plays a critical role in promoting sustainable development by equipping learners with the skills and competences needed to address global challenges such as climate change, poverty, environmental degradation and inequality.

This article will explore the challenges and opportunities of adult education in the 5IR with a focus on leveraging inclusiveness for sustainable development. It will examine the state of adult

education, identify the challenges and opportunities presented by the 5IR, and discuss strategies for promoting inclusiveness and sustainable adult education.

Challenges of Adult Education in the 5th Industrial Revolution in Nigeria

Adult education in Nigeria has not been keeping pace with dynamic social challenges confronting the nation through the evolution of 5th Industrial Revolution. Education (adult education inclusive) in its entirety is geared toward promoting social challenges, enhance skill acquisition, better individuals and promote inclusiveness. It is on this note therefore that the 5IR present challenges for adult education in Nigeria. The challenges are enormous because the world has become a global stage through the innovation of information, communication and technology and the digitalization of learning to meet adult needs even in the remote places has become inevitable. Therefore the inability of adult learners to adapt to new challenges, acquire skills, develop competences which will enable them fit in the 5th Industrial Revolution are major challenges facing adult education in Nigeria. Hence some of the challenges are;

Poor Funding: The Nigerian educational system has being bedeviled with poor funding both in the Federal, State and even Local Government Authorities. This system not only affected formal education system but all types of education including adult education. The budgetary allocation for education is generally very poor with yearly allocation less than the 26% recommended by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for developing countries such as Nigeria. In fact the highest budgetary allocation in education in Nigeria is 11% in 2006 and 10.5% in 2015 (Owede, 2022). The International Conference on Financing Adult Education for Development in 2009 (UNESCO, 2009) recommended for a minimum of 6% for Adult Education but this has not been met by any government in Nigeria. That is why (Obasi, 2014; Ajiye, 2022) insist that adult education in Nigeria is often underfunded thereby limiting its

reach and quality. Therefore the problem of poor funding has led to high rate of illiteracy, poverty, low quality education, poor economic growth, poor learning and poor conducive environment among others. Adult education remains an important catalyst for national development as it will enhance productivity, improve global participation and promote inclusiveness. Poor financial funding has been a big challenge not only in educational sector but in all other sectors of the economy.

Public Perception and Awareness: Adult education is as old as man both as a body of knowledge and a field of study; however, there appears to be widespread public misperception and poor awareness in understanding the utility benefits of adult education towards national sustainable development, reduction in illiteracy and enhancement of adult participation in national and global affairs. Most people especially in developing countries like Nigeria are yet to come to terms with the true concept of adult education and what it will offer to the country as a discipline. This poor public perception and awareness is a big challenge that if not critically handled will contribute to low enrolment and patronage by the adults and help stabilize poverty and unsustainable development (Ajile, 2022).

Dearth of Infrastructure and ICT Accessibility: Infrastructure is inevitable for socio-economic development of any nation including communities. Dearth of infrastructure is seemingly responsible for increase poverty; low investments, low human capacity utilization, poor basic social needs and mostly increase illiteracy (Okonkwo, Ekekwe & Okeke, 2019). The poor infrastructural development will drastically affect access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which is a veritable means for achieving 5th Industrial Revolution (5IR) in the country and at the same time hinder access to adult education programmes.

Shortage of Adult Facilitators: Education as a profession requires high level trained manpower who understands the rudiments of imparting knowledge to learners (students). Adult education as a lifelong learning requires a well-trained facilitator or change agent who not only knows how to teach an adult but understands the peculiarities of an adult learner. In Nigeria as in most developing nations where there is high level of misconception about the importance of adult education to national development, the government does not consider training or retraining adult facilitators for improve output. This has created shortage of adult facilitators in Nigeria which has equally affected the quality of adult education programmes (Yahaya, 2024). If these challenges are not urgently arrested, they will make 5IR a mirage.

Poor Management and Corruption: Management in any human endeavour is critical to development. Management as a concept is the coordination of all the resources of organization through the process of planning, organizing, directing and controlling in order to attain organizational objectives. Therefore a well-managed adult education programmes and activities devoid of corruption, mismanagement of fund among others will produce adults capable of meeting the 5IR needs. In Nigeria as in most developing countries, adult education and programmes are managed by non-professionals which hinder its effectiveness and utility values. Majority of those in the helm of affairs of adult education in Nigeria are not professionals and cannot give what they do not have (Olojede, 2012). In that instance, adult education must be entrusted to professionals devoid of corruption and mismanagement in order to overcome the challenge.

Poor Supervision and Monitoring: Effective supervision and monitoring in education and most importantly in adult programmes and activities cannot be underplayed by any nation that wants to develop. Quality control in adult education can only be guaranteed through regular and effective

supervision and monitoring. The issue of supervision and monitoring should therefore not be taken with levity if adult education is truly to overcome the challenges, create wealth, and sustain national development.

Gender Disparity and Religious Belief: Gender disparity and religious belief in Nigeria is a big threat to national development and global transformation associated with the 5th Industrial Revolution. Adult education is an all-inclusive and lifelong learning without age or sex bias. In the northern part of the country which is predominantly Moslem, the religion to a large extent prevents women (even girl child) from accessing education like her male counterpart. In most part of the southern Nigeria, cultural affiliation hinders the female gender from competing with her male counterpart educationally. This male preference is so rooted in Igbo culture such that the female child is essentially left to do all activities that are kitchen and farm related. In another development, a female child is given to early marriage by the parents. This, in most cases is associated to poverty as female early marriage is basically associated to economic poor parents and a means of raising money for the training of the male child. These gender bias, religious belief and cultural challenges in Nigeria pose a serious hindrance to the growth and development of education and most especially adult education in the country.

Insecurity: The country has been battling with widespread security issues such as banditry, kidnapping for ransom taking, Boko Haram insurgence among others which have led to high level of poverty in the country. These have also increased and enhanced the challenges of 5th Industrial Revolution thereby making it harder to achieve sustainable development through adult education.

Opportunities of Adult Education in the 5th Industrial Revolution in Nigeria

The 5th Industrial Revolution (5IR) is a transformational evolutionary innovation with numerous opportunities tailored towards adult education in Nigeria to enhance human knowledge and skills,

and ensure full participation of adults in the rapidly changing world. The 5IR come with such opportunities that if well harnessed will transform the world into a global village.

Lifelong Learning: Lifelong learning as a component of adult education gives every adult citizen in the society the opportunity to contribute and participate meaningfully in the development of the society. The innovation in Information, Communication and Technology in education has propelled lifelong learning to cope with the growing technology, enhance skill diversity and population mobility. It is on this note that UNESCO (2019) affirmed that the 5IR emphasizes the need that adult education can promote adaptability and human upgrading to meet the changes and challenges of global needs.

Employment: Employment is the manifestation of power redistribution which challenges patriarchal ideology and man dominance (Okafor & Onukwu, 2022). In this instance adult education is an inclusive process which enables adults (male or female) to access materials as well as information resources, and to have control so as to participate and engage actively in the development of the nation. Adult education programmes such as vocational skill training equips adult participants to own small businesses which lead to self-reliance. The flexibility of adult literacy programmes allows market women to attend literacy classes in order to enhance their ability to read, write and compute. The literacy programmes help to improve financial record keeping and at the same time reduce financial losses. Therefore Adult education has the capacity and potential to empower adult citizens, promote social transformation and enhance sustainable self-reliance and national development (Yahaya, 2024)

Empowerment: Empowerment is being economically self-reliant and independent. Aka and Omoyima (2022) insist that empowerment is the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and in the nation. Adult education programmes and activities are geared toward

empowering participants both in knowledge and skills. Therefore, information, communication and technology which constitute the major driver of 5IR empower individuals to actively participate and be involved with the opportunities of 5IR as it will create jobs, enhance skills and promote knowledge. Thus, ICT empowerment of individuals can be in form of active participation and involvement in an organization, it also involves collective decision making and shared leadership at the community, state and global level.

Skill Acquisition: Community as an integral part of a country is confronted with numerous challenges ranging on how to acquire skills, knowledge among others in order to reduce dependency and poverty. Therefore adult vocational education is tailored toward the context that at the end of the training all the participants must have acquired a skill which will enable them enhance self-sustaining and, or improve their productivity where such a participant is employed. ICT in all educational levels is a catalyst which plays prominent roles in skill acquisition and vocational training. It is a machine that enhances and propels individuals towards skill acquisition and self-reliant (Okafor & Okafor, 2024). In agreement with the role of ICT, Daniju (2017) states that the best option for empowerment is skill acquisition as it will ensure financial independence, self-sufficient and a better standard of living.

Rural Industry: Rural industries can be successfully implemented in communities where the local resources are based. Such implementable rural industries are cassava processing, palm oil processing, small scale poultry, and catfish farming among others. These could be achieved in communities through adult education by providing skills and ensuring access to finance. One of the cardinal opportunities of adult education in the 5IR is the development of rural industries. Countries can be transformed through rural industries to urban cities and so reduce urban migrations. Therefore integrating ICT into adult education curriculum will enhance digital skills;

fasten rural development as adults will be exposed on the use of computer, and internet among others. Adeyemo (2021) insists that ICT Skill Development Training, Mobile Phone-Based Learning and other ICT-induced adult education programmes and activities could be achieved through Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises (SMSE) like business centers, ICT training schools or centers will enhance employment and rural self-reliant. That is why Bello (2022) states that the role of industries in rural transformation could help to promote self-employment, self-reliant, rural based job opportunities and investments, intensify national development and sustainable well-being of the people.

Adult Education: Leveraging on Inclusiveness for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Adult education programmes and activities are veritable instruments for transmitting knowledge, skills and information that promote inclusiveness of all adult citizens towards national sustainable development. Inclusiveness therefore is very critical towards enhancing sustainable national development in Nigeria because it involves all segments of the society and contributes to the development processes.

Leveraging on inclusiveness, gender equality should be maintained and women and girl-child be empowered to participate actively in development principles. Okafor and Onukwu (2022) averred that women in a community or country are the most viable, resourceful and potential human resources not only in population structure but also in social and empowering women to participate in adult education programmes and activities, vocational training, and basic education acquisition are inevitable and development sustained.

Adult education offers opportunities that help adults' recipients to acquire relevant knowledge, skills and information and attitudinal change to address and participate in community development activities of his/her country. Inclusive access to adult education and vocational skills will generally

enable individuals to participate in national development. It will empower the adults to make informed decisions, promote self-reliance, increase literacy and reduce poverty.

The general purpose of adult education is to assist adults and young adults to increase competence in order to adapt to their society through the acquisition of practical skills, knowledge, attitude, and values that will enable them to solve personal problems and partake in national development (Anyanwu, Ononeze and Chukwuji, 2019). It is therefore imperative to accommodate the needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups through inclusive adult education programmes and activities as no citizen will be excluded.

Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) is a veritable instrument for enhancing inclusive adult education in Nigeria. Therefore leveraging on ICT will enhance unhindered access to education, skills and information as adults will access them at the comfort of their homes, and, or offices at their pace and time. Incorporating digital literacy education into all adult education programmes will help equip individuals with skills needed for the 5th Industrial Revolution.

Conclusion

The 5th Industrial Revolution is a transformational innovation as it is tailored towards making the world a global place. It is an innovation that all developing countries of the world should align with because of its developmental processes. Therefore, adult education programmes and activities should be channeled towards training and retraining of adults in order to meet the challenges posed by the 5th Industrial Revolution. Adult education should be made all inclusive in nature so that the country will witness educational, cultural, economic, political, and social transformation as adult education programmes and activities become more accessible to adults and equally meet their needs. These will not only reduce the challenges pose by the 5th Industrial Revolution but will enhance the country to benefit from the numerous opportunities offered by the 5th Industrial

Revolution. The opportunities of 5th Industrial Revolution could only be harnessed if adult education programmes and activities are made inclusively accessible, well-funded and devoid of gender disparity for national sustainable development.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions, the following recommendations were made

1. The government at all levels should initiate and promote policies and programmes that will be all inclusive. This will enable the adult citizens of the country to actively participate in the development of their communities for enhance national development.
2. The government should collaborate with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and private sectors to create awareness about the importance of adult education in a developing country. This is because Non-Governmental Organizations and private sectors complement government roles in strengthening adult education and making sure that no group is excluded. For instance, UNESCO supports literacy programmes in Nigeria and fund community learning centers as part of their Corporate Services. UNICEF promotes inclusive education for women and girls, persons with disability and rural population while Tony Elumelu Foundation promotes self-reliance and employment for all. These will help reduce societal or, individual held misconceptions about adult education programmes and activities.
3. In order to benefit from the 5th Industrial Revolution, adult education budget must be increased to meet UNESCO, 2009 recommendation of a minimum of 6% for Adult Education which has not been met by any government in Nigerian. A well-funded adult education programmes will also increase participation of adult citizens. reduce poverty and increase self-reliance.

4. Adult education curriculum must be revisited with a view to including digital divides which are catalyst for 5th Industrial Revolution. This will help adult learners be abreast with modern technologies.

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