

## Administrative Challenges in Providing Lifelong Learning in Rivers State

**Ugochukwu Kysburn AGI**

Department of Educational Management  
Faculty of Education

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria  
[kysburnagi@gmail.com](mailto:kysburnagi@gmail.com), [kysburn\\_agi@yahoo.com](mailto:kysburn_agi@yahoo.com)

**Anthony HARRISON**

Department of Educational Management  
Faculty of Education

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria  
[apriwis@yahoo.com](mailto:apriwis@yahoo.com)

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### Abstract

Lifelong learning remains one of the educational avenues in realizing the productive energy of the nation through equipping citizens with necessary skills, knowledge and competencies. In this paper, attempt has been made to x-ray and discuss the challenges encountered in providing lifelong learning in Rivers State. Suggestions have also being made as how to harness this veritable form of education for the development of the state.

**Keywords:** Lifelong, Learning, Education, Administrative, Challenges.

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### INTRODUCTION

Education has remained the major instrument for national development for many countries of the world including Nigeria. The acquisition of knowledge, skills, capacities and competencies to achieve the desired developments are provided by formal education systematically structured and planned by authorized ministries and agencies on the basis of the country's philosophical foundation of education. Education has its objectives and targets. Recipients are to exhibit modified behaviours that assist them to tackle challenges related to their professed fields of study. This has remained the critical context of education as emphasized and underlined by the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014). Thus, the education system is expected to produce medical doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, scientists, technologists, administrators, economists and many others required to sustain the society. The services they render are germane for continuation of society.

However, work or service rendered, is time bound and age related. At certain age, workers are expected to retire from active paid employment. There is also the question of those who loose their jobs due to the following factors:

- Economic recession
- Inappropriate skills/competence
- Poor performance
- Possessing wrong certificate
- Unacceptable salaries
- Conditions of services
- Disagreement with employers on modus operandi
- Relocation of family to new community
- Underemployment

Whatever becomes the reasons why anyone loses job, Montgomery (2012), observed that workplace is becoming dynamic and changing rapidly. Work itself is taking new dimensions and sophistication. The introduction of technological innovations to work has numerous challenges for the workforce. Whether in the hospital or classroom, workers are faced with modern technical equipment and facilities that must be used to achieve specific targets. It then is expected that workforce needs to develop the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies to function effectively and respond to work place demands.

Apart from educated workforce, at workplace, individuals and community people equally face challenges living in a world bedeviled by environmental challenges, economic recession, health malaise, climate change, globalized economy gender disparity. People and communities require modern knowledge, skills and competences to face up to the challenges of sustainable livelihood, sustainable development and sustainable community.

## **The Question**

The fundamental question that agitates the mind is whether education received at whatever level has been able to ever prepared anyone to face the challenges of doing something new or losing one's job or retiring and remaining productive and or living in the community to face the challenges enumerated above without certain skills and competencies. It is really tempting to think that prior to the setting up of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 by United Nations, the world leaders had perceived the deteriorating standards of living and the struggling humanity in poor countries of the world or the disconnections. McAurthur (2014) in reviewing the reasons behind the MDGs by United Nations, clearly identified it (MDGs) as a response to many of the world's challenges, such as:

- Asian Financial crisis of 1997-98
- Latin American economic crises
- Economic crises in the Eastern Europe bleak due to the collapse of Soviet Union.
- Two "lost decades" of economic growth of sub-Saharan Africa and the ravaging effects of HIV/AIDS on over 25 million people.

The issues raised in the MDGs are expected to address economic, health and environment challenges were beyond school education. Achieving these goals by 2015 needed several platforms and protocols outside the classrooms and demanded also practical interactions with stakeholders in communities and similar setups. Learning and doing sustainability were all intertwined and required continuous learning.

Similarly, the most recent response to challenges facing mankind for which schools did not prepare us is the establishment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Seventeen in number, they cut across every aspect of human life and would be achieved through practical involvements of persons and community using various agencies and platforms, mostly outside the usual school classrooms and laboratories. The goals are targeted at making life worthwhile and the earth a better place to live.

Taken together, MDGs and SDGs are responses to challenges created by gaps opened up by education not blended with lifelong learning. This itself, most European nations had realized needed attention. This is because people keep needing ideas, knowledge and competencies to deal with life situations on daily basis.

The question here is what kind of education is needed to keep up with the competencies, skills, knowledge, required to face life challenges daily and continually. How do people remain economically and socially connected to the present and future developments of an ever-changing and evolving society controlled by local and international forces? How does a society re-equip an ageing adult population to remain productive, and/or a huge section of a young population to contribute its economic prosperity in time of economic contractions? Is there no form of learning that can be offered these populations that is cost effective and citizen friendly, voluntary and self-motivated that provides opportunities for people of all ages? World Education Forum (2015) suggested equitable and inclusive education system designed to facilitate lifelong and life-wide learning through formal, non-formal and informal learning that offer opportunities for all ages.

### **What is Lifelong Learning?**

Lifelong learning is conceptualized as continuous acquisition or learning of experiences, skills, knowledge, capacities, competencies needed throughout life relevant to sustain the individual or professional in their environment or community and or at workplace for the period they are active and productive. Lifelong learning has been defined as all learning activities undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal civic, social and or employment-related perspective (Ololube, Onyekwere & Agbor, 2016). Ololube (2004) describes lifelong learning as “on-going”, ‘voluntary’ and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional development that places the individual at a vantage position to adjust with the conjecture of the demands of time and construction of the workplace. The philosophical foundation of lifelong learning is based on the understanding of promoting access and participation of the population in being part of their living, productiveness and value to both community life and economy. This is because it promotes personal and professional development of the individual. Rees, Fewe, Furlong and Corard (2006). It is also seen as alternative pathway for updating skills, knowledge and competencies. The European Commission for Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013) sees it as a programme to provide adults new and alternative way of acquiring new skills and competence whether through formal, non-formal or informal education and either individual or in an aggregate of learning community.

Taken together, lifelong learning results from a personal conviction to improve and add value to one’s economic or social capital. It is ongoing throughout life and results in equipping the individual to face the challenges of living a complex and dynamic society.

## **What are the skills, competencies and capacities needed?**

Smethurst (1995), Aspin and Chapman (2001) and OECD (1992), all concluded that success in life does not only depend on academic skill or degrees. They are agreed that “independence of the mind and autonomy of the spirit” is largely responsible for the value of human capital at any calling. These skills required will include:

- Numeracy and computer literacy
- Research ability
- Team building
- Cooperation
- Interpersonal skills
- Sound reason and judgment
- Discrimination
- Imaginative skills and creativity

[www.globaldigitalaayigen.org](http://www.globaldigitalaayigen.org) (2015) added the following:

- Effective study skills
- Financial management skills
- Time management skills
- Report writing skill
- Negotiation skills
- Technical skills.

These skills are seen as fundamental elements in economic progress, personal development, social inclusiveness, democratic understanding and ability to remain relevant in the community and workplace (OECD, 1992). Lifelong learning is expected to be embedded as adult learning programmes, entrepreneurship programmes, non-formal and education programmes. It also includes informal learning.

## **What are the administrative challenges that face lifelong learning?**

Lifelong learning, can be accessed or provided at the various structures of formal, non-formal and informal education (Ololube et al., 2016). However, World Education Forum 2015 at Incheon, Republic of Korea, placed a special emphasis on transferring lifelong learning through formal education. OECD (1992) stressed this point further as it suggests that skills acquired through lifelong learning be linked to knowledge economy. It further identified importance of cognitive competence systematically arranged. Altogether, lifelong learning does not mean informal education or learning only. The framework for Action for lifelong education regards it as “an organizing principle of all forms of education.

Lifelong learning having been accepted as organizing principle, needs, reflecting, permeating all forms of education, and posing fundamental administrative challenges towards its provision, operation and sustainability in Nigeria. If then, the provision of lifelong learning is done at the formal education setting as it is been done in most European countries, the administrative challenges to be encountered would include though not limited to the following:

## **Acceptability of lifelong learning/attitude**

The National Policy on Education (2014) clearly identified that adult and non-formal education and open and distance education are both, non-formal and formal education as platforms for the realization of lifelong learning. These programmes have been calculated to address persons who:

- Had graduated from schools but wish to update their skills and knowledge in the areas of their choice.
- Re-enter schools for knowledge
- Have interest in acquiring basic education.
- Wishing to remedy their deficiencies
- Wish to acquire numeracy and literacy (FRN, 2014)

Much as the intention of government to get citizens to seize opportunities provided by these programmes to acquire new skills and add value to their persons, there is noticeable apathy to accepting these opportunities especially at the Basic and Post-Basic education levels. While students at open and distance learning programmes at the tertiary level have positive attitude and acceptance of the opportunities due to availability of modern platforms and facilities, acceptance at the Basic levels of education is almost non existence in Rivers State mainly due to structural organization, non availability of readily identified centres and lack of working opportunities for world be participants as highlighted by Ojo and Olakulehhim (2006). The attitude problem militating against the acceptance of lifelong learning as represented by adult and non-formal and open and distance education in Nigeria is reemphasized in a study by Adedokun (2014).

It is really important to note that educational administrators cannot get people to access lifelong learning that presents unique opportunity to people to renew their skills and develop different competencies because of attitude or perception problems.

## **Age Barrier**

Providers of lifelong learning in Nigeria are also faced with yet an issue or factor which had since became irrelevant in Europe and the American continents. Age has remained a strong factor to many would-be population who could have accessed lifelong learning. Uzoegwu and Iloanasi (2001) clearly identified age factor as affecting acceptance of lifelong learning. Administrators and providers of lifelong learning programmes are not able to convince retirees and such categories of people that they could learn new skills, competencies that could be useful.

## **Facilities/ infrastructure**

Facilities/infrastructure are fundamental in every educational or learning station. Edem and Okon (2008) and Akhihero (2011) described educational facilities or school infrastructure as those 'material things that facilitate teaching and learning process in school'. Educational facilities or school infrastructures range from physical buildings – classrooms, laboratories, libraries, workshops, studios, theatres; to computers and television. There is electricity, water supply, usable, etc. These are facilities and infrastructures aid teaching and learning process if they are made available to school and would benefit lifelong learning programmes.

The lifelong learning programme which are mostly Open and Distance Education and Adult and Non-formal Education programmes in Nigeria, require the availability of such facilities and equipment like electricity, computers, mobile libraries, mobile learning workshops to achieve its objectives especially at the Basic and Post-Basic education level. This is because, essential skills and competence such as computer literacy, management skills, communication skills are to be taught and learned.

However, the apparent lack or absence of these facilities in schools where lifelong learning programmes are integrated would hamper effective teaching and learning of skills and competencies (Edem & Okon, 2008). This situation constitutes a major administrative challenge to the provision of lifelong learning.

### **Integration of Lifelong Learning into Formal School Setting**

The UNESCO Education Strategy (2014-2030) regards lifelong learning as “organizing principle of all forms of learning/education”. The implication is that all forms of learning and all levels must integrate lifelong learning contents. The further implication is that formal schooling should be an integration of all learning necessary for acquisition of knowledge of core curriculum, skills and competencies for transformative living and productivity. In other words, all knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for human survival should be acquired together within the same learning context. This approach is widely accepted among European Union member states. The Erasmus programme by the European Union which encourages students’ mobility to other universities on exchange programmes to take part in differing learning activities is to achieve this integration of learning context.

This is not the case here in Nigeria. Open and Distance Education as well as non-formal and Adult education are not designed to achieve lifelong learning defined to achieve similar objectives of “productive citizenship” across the region. This perhaps might remain the greatest challenge to the providers and administrators of lifelong learning in Nigeria.

### **Quality Assurance**

Given that most lifelong learning programmes in Nigeria are Open and Distance Education and Adult Non-formal programme, Quality Assurance is a vital element in its administration. The process of the programme requires effective attention and scrutiny. Like the European Union, mechanism for ensuring successful lifelong learning programmes is needed. Competencies framework, guidelines for programme validation, criteria for staff quality, conditions for participation, criteria for completion by participants are all critical factors for programme providers and administrators (Bengoetxea, Kallioinen, Schmidt-Jortzig & Thorn, 2011). The challenges before administrators of lifelong learning is mainly to adhere to quality assurance guidelines. This is to ensure that courses taught contain the activities intended to improve learners knowledge, skills and competences.

### **Policy/Policy implementation**

Lifelong learning is hidden inside Open and Distance Education in the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2014). In the policy statement, lifelong learning is seen where it is indicated in section 9, subsection 91 stated thus: Advantages of Open/Distance Education is often taken for

lifelong learning by those who...” A clear cut policy and as it is in most regions of the world, especially Europe needed to be made. As a result of not being clearly demarcated from Open and Distance Education or non-formal education, its context, complexities structure, benefits, challenges are clearly missed or muddled up. This also has led to its low acceptance and perception even by students at the tertiary education level and those in the community (McCook, 2002).

### **Funding**

Funding remains a major constraint. Facilities and structure, staff and staff training, Quality Assurance measures, all depend on the availability of funds. As the budget for education continues to dwindle on yearly basis and on all subsections of education, lifelong learning seen as fringe activity in education cannot be affected the less. If lifelong learning is to curb employment and make people productive again, then lack of funds could cause any such programme of intervention very severe setback. Already, the unemployment rate and unemployable population is an evidence that lifelong learning programmes designed to support individual and community is far-fetched and readily unavailable everywhere (McCook & Barber, 2002; Sabates, 2008).

### **Staff/Staff Training**

This is also a critical aspect of lifelong learning. Faculties of Education, Institutes of Education, Colleges of Education are engaged in training teachers in traditional areas of teaching for Basic, Post-Basic and Tertiary Education. Adult Education departments exist in some universities in the country, but shortage of staff is also a serious threat to using lifelong learning in the generation of skills, competences and knowledge that are needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy. Short supply of staff means that lifelong learning centres would be few in the state.

### **Learners' Characteristics**

One major challenge, administrators of programmes like lifelong learning are confronted with is learners' characteristics. Learners in lifelong learning have peculiar characteristics such as age, intelligence, health, psychological and physical conditions, biological changes and they influence long life learning (Alhassau, 2012). These characteristics would therefore affect teaching methodology a teacher adopts, teaching aids and even content. The challenge for administration is that of close supervision of the learning process. This is more or so when the target of lifelong learning goes beyond being only economically viable.

### **CONCLUSION**

Lifelong learning, just like formal education schooling, has its major objective of raising a productive population flexible enough to fit into dynamic global 21<sup>st</sup> century. Though, this learning platform is least explored, it has the capacity of invigorating the Nigerian economy. A number of challenges however, stand to face the effective establishment and operation of lifelong learning in Rivers State. They include attitudinal problems, physical and psychological state of the learners, lack of clear policy, funding, shortage of adequately prepared staff. It is however,

important that the government of Rivers State to try its hands on lifelong learning, given the benefits nations of the world derive from it.

## Recommendations

Lifelong learning platform has been effectively deployed by many countries across Europe, America and Asia due to its contributions to adding value to productive life of the people. It could achieve the same effect here. Therefore, the following suggestions are made:

- The Rivers State Government should have a clear cut policy on lifelong learning, possibly setting a commission to deal with it.
- Budgeting allocation should be made directly to the commission which must be seen as interventionist.
- Lifelong learning commission or agencies should be encouraged to access collaboration and partnerships with those with considerable knowledge and experience.
- There must be active enlightenment/campaign to educate the people of the enormous social and economic benefits derivable from acquiring new skills, competencies and knowledge.
- Lifelong learning should deliberately linked or connected to state economy which opens up avenue for such facilities as new job opportunities, grants and partnership.
- Lifelong learning should be integrated into formal schooling to reduce the level of attitudinal problems, age related barriers and misconception as learning for failed people.
- Effective management of lifelong learning requires well trained staff and department.

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