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LIFELONG LEARNING TARGETS OF EDUCATION 2030 AGENDA AND POLICY-IMPLEMENTATION MODALITIES IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

Education 2030 Agenda, popularly tagged the "Incheon Declaration", is the new vision of education agreed upon by over 1, 600 participants from 160 countries at World Education Forum held in Republic of Korea from 19-22 May, 2015 with the theme "Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all". This paper critically examined the lifelong learning opportunities for all targets of the Agenda and discussed policy directions and implementation modalities for achieving the cardinal focus areas of the targets. The paper began with the examination of the components of access, equity and inclusion, quality and learning outcomes, and lifelong learning for all opportunities. It also examined the lifelong learning opportunities targets of the Agenda and identified the pillars upon which the targets are anchored. The recommendations on policy direction and implementation modalities for each of the pillars were suggested. The paper was concluded with the submission that adult education, adult learning and training opportunities, literacy, education for sustainable development, global citizenship education framework must be given utmost priority in order to achieve the targets of the lifelong learning opportunities for all in Nigeria.

Keywords: Education 2030 Agenda, lifelong learning targets, literacy, education for sustainable development, global citizenship education, adult learning/training opportunities

Introduction

The Education 2030 has been universally described as the "new vision of education" designed to leave no one behind.. The agenda was designed "to attend to the 'unfinished business" of the EFA agenda and the education-related MDGs, as well as address global and national education challenges. It was inspired by a humanistic vision of education and development based on human rights and dignity, social justice, protection, cultural diversity, and shared responsibility and accountability (World Education Forum 2015). The vision of the agenda is fully captured by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 "*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all*" and its corresponding targets.

The cardinal focus areas of the agenda are access, equity and inclusion, quality and learning outcomes, within a lifelong learning approach. The *access* component of the agenda requires the expansion of educational opportunities in term of the following: provision of at least 12 years of publicly-funded quality formal education for all, provision of at least 9 years of free and compulsory quality primary and lower secondary education, provision of at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education, and provision of meaningful education opportunities for out-of-school children and adolescents.

The *inclusion and equity* component of the agenda addresses all forms of exclusion and marginalisation, disparities and inequalities in education, commitment to the principles of non-discrimination in education and recognition of the importance of gender equality as well as that of girls' and women's empowerment for sustainable development.

The *quality* component of the agenda contains the following:

- The provision of quality education to foster creativity and knowledge,
- The acquisition of the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy, analytic problem-solving skills, and other high-level cognitive and interpersonal skills,
- The development of the skills, values and attitudes that enable citizens to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, make informed decisions, and respond to local and global challenges through education for sustainable development (ESD) and global citizenship education (GCED).

The *learning outcomes* component of the agenda contains the improvement and strengthening of the inputs, processes, and measuring progress as well as the stipulation that every learner be taught by qualified, motivated, and professionally-supported teachers within well-resourced and effectively governed systems.

The *lifelong learning opportunities for all* framework of the agenda includes the following:

- The equitable expansion of technical, vocational education/training, higher education and research.
- The strengthening of science, technology and innovation.
- Incorporation of flexible learning pathways as well as the recognition, validation, and accreditation of knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education.
- The use of information and communication technologies, as well as ensuring that all youth and adults, especially girls and women, achieve relevant and recognized functional literacy and numeracy proficiency levels.
- The provision of with adult learning, education and training opportunities.

The detailed description of the focus areas of the Education 2030 shows that the agenda is not only huge, holistic and ambitious in nature but it is also aspirational and transformative. A critical analysis of the entire agenda and framework of action in relation to policy designs and formulations cannot be effectively and efficiently discussed in a single paper. This will be superfluous and cumbersome to do. Therefore, the general focus of this paper is limited to *lifelong learning opportunities for all* targets of the agenda while the specific focus is on *"ensuring that all youth and adults, especially girls and women, achieve relevant and recognized functional literacy and numeracy proficiency levels and that they are provided with adult learning, education and training opportunities"*.

In essence, this paper addresses the four cardinal issues: policy designs and implementation modalities for ensuring that all youth and adults achieve relevant and recognised functional literacy and numeracy proficiency, education for sustainable development, global citizenship education, and adult learning and education/training opportunities for all youth and adults. This is based on the affirmation that all youth and adults need to develop as a whole person, fulfill their potentials and help shape a shared future built on the well-being of individuals, communities and the planet.

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Strategic Targets of Education 2030 Agenda

The roadmap for the achievement of the Education 2030 Agenda, anchored on the access, equity and inclusion, quality and learning outcomes, as well as lifelong learning opportunities, earlier discussed, are captured in seven strategic targets presented below:

Target 4.1- By 2030; ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

Target 4.2- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

Target 4.3- By 2030; ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including University.

Target 4.4- By 2030; substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship.

Target 4.5- By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

Target 4.6- By 2030; ensure that all youth and substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

Target 4.7- By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development.

It can be stated that while all the targets are constructed within the lifelong learning approach, with the firm belief that education systems which promote lifelong learning should adopt a holistic and sector-wide approach involving all sub-sectors and levels to ensure the provision of learning opportunities for all individuals.

Re-visiting Lifelong Learning as a Concept and Practice

The emergence of the global knowledge economy has put a premium on learning throughout the world. Therefore, lifelong learning is becoming a necessity in the world of today. The cardinal philosophy of lifelong learning hinges on the provision of learning opportunities or opportunities for learning throughout one's lifetime. Lifelong learning opportunities are increasingly becoming critical for individuals and countries to be competitive in the global knowledge economy. It is not just education and training beyond formal schooling, it is a learning framework which encompasses learning throughout the lifecycle, from early childhood to retirement and to death. In a complex and fast-changing world, lifelong learning has become 'a philosophy, a conceptual framework, and an organising principle of all forms of education' (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, UIIL, 2010).

From the overall perspectives of lifelong learning, we can ascertain the following:

- Lifelong learning is rooted in the integration of learning and living.
- It covers learning activities for people of all ages (children, young people, adults and elderly, girls and boys, women and men).
- It takes place in all life-wide contexts (family, school, community, workplace, among others).
- It can be carried out through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal) which together meet a wide range of learning needs and demands (World Bank Report, 2003).

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While the first three contexts have been widely discussed, the fourth context- the variety of modalities of implementing lifelong learning- have focused more attention on the formal education modality in Nigeria. The thesis of this paper is, therefore, based on the urgent need for education policy planners to pay due attention and priority to the non-formal and informal modalities of implementing lifelong learning.

The Pillars of Lifelong Learning

The pillars of the lifelong learning opportunities for all, as contained in the Education 2030 Agenda, rest on lifelong literacy and numeracy, education for sustainable development (ESD), global citizenship education (GCED), adult learning, education and training opportunities. These are well captured in targets 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7. The achievement of these pillars, to meet a wide range of learning needs and demands, are more appropriately contained within the non-formal and informal frameworks and modalities. Therefore, policy design and implementation modalities must essentially focus on each of these pillars.

Conceptualising Literacy within Lifelong Learning Context

Literacy and numeracy have been perceived as indispensable to the achievement of the goal and the related targets set out in the Education 2030 Framework for Action (UNESCO 2014). However, literacy and numeracy can only unfold their full potential to 'transform the world' if they are approached from a lifelong learning perspective and brought closer to people's lives through integrated, multi-sectoral approaches (Hanemann, 2015).

Literacy usually refers to a set of skills and practices comprising reading, writing and using numbers as mediated by written materials. However, literacy has evolved into a multidimensional and complex concept. Literacy is denoted from two contexts: Literacy as a competency: the capability of putting knowledge, skills, attitudes and values effectively into action when dealing with (handwritten, printed or digital) text in the context of ever-changing demands. This is literacy directly concerned with written text. The other context of literacy is the metaphorical use of the term to designate competency or skills in senses other than those of the written text (e.g. computer literacy, financial literacy, health literacy). From the two contexts, we can acknowledge the 'plurality' of literacy and literacy practices.

In today's fast-changing society everyone needs to have a wide set of knowledge, skills and competences, including literacy, numeracy and digital competency at a proficiency level in order to learn, adapt and participate in social, economic, cultural, and civic life. The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in 2016, indicates that adults with low levels of proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments face a higher risk of unemployment, a higher incidence of poverty and social exclusion, higher health risks and lower life expectancy.

Hanemann (2015) offers an analytical framework for lifelong literacy within a lifelong learning perspective. It comprises three dimensions that are closely interrelated: (1) literacy as a lifelong learning process, (2) literacy as a life-wide process, and (3) literacy as part of a set of holistic, sector-wide and cross-sectoral reforms towards lifelong learning systems.

Literacy as a lifelong learning process

Literacy learning is a continuous activity leading to different proficiency levels. Competency levels, acquired at a given moment in time, can be insufficient, outdated or lost in another. It is meaningless to talk of someone being either 'literate' or 'illiterate'. Literacy is a learning continuum of proficiency levels. The goal of any policy on literacy should be to 'improve levels of literacy' rather than to 'eradicate illiteracy'. The acquisition and development of literacy takes place before, during and after primary education, in and out of school, and through formal, non-formal and informal learning, throughout a person's life. It is never too early or too late to start literacy and numeracy learning.

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Literacy as a life-wide process

People use and develop their reading and writing skills in different ways across a wide range of life spheres. There are many resources in different spaces or places – at home, in the community, at work, in the (electronic) media, on the internet, and in cultural centres, libraries, museums, among others. Strengthening emphasis on the demand side of a 'literate environment' is about linking literacy to economic, social and cultural activities which people want or need to develop in their daily lives, thereby creating requirements and opportunities for the use, improvement and retention of literacy skills to make them sustainable. Related programmes try to integrate knowledge and skills (i.e. technical and vocational education and training, and other practical and 'life skills') – in life spheres and domains such as livelihoods, health, human rights, citizenship, gender equality and parenting – with the development of literacy, numeracy and digital competency

Literacy as part of a set of holistic, sector-wide and cross-sectoral reforms towards lifelong learning systems

Education reforms that promote the development of lifelong learning systems should adopt a holistic and sector-wide approach with a longer-term planning horizon. The vision of lifelong learning supports the idea of building bridges between different components, actors, institutions, processes, learning spaces (life spheres) and moments (life phases) to develop holistically designed learning systems. Lifelong literacy covers the full spectrum of lifelong and lifewide learning and involves a continuum of proficiency levels that require institutionalised learning systems which are flexible and support integrated approaches at all stages of a person's life and in a diversity of life situations.

Furthermore, a holistic approach to literacy seeks to associate literacy learning with other essential development tasks by making literacy part of national development strategies. The successful combination of learning and living requires a cross-sectoral approach cutting across all development relevant areas (health, agriculture, labour, social security, environment, culture, etc.), beyond the education sector.

Conceptualising Education for Sustainable Development within Lifelong Learning Context

In a globalised world, with unresolved social, political, economic, and environmental challenges, education that helps in building peaceful and sustainable societies is essential. Education systems seldom fully integrate such transformative approaches. Education for sustainable development was, therefore, given a central place in Education 2030 Agenda to strengthening education's contribution to the fullfilment of human rights, peace and responsible citizenship from local to global levels, gender equality, sustainable development and health. The knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required by citizens to lead productive lives, make informed decisions, and assume active roles locally and globally in facing and resolving global challenges can be acquired through education for sustainable development (ESD) and global citizenship education (GCED).

Education for sustainable development (ESD) empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society for present and future generations while respecting cultural diversity. It is about lifelong learning and is an integral part of quality education. ESD is holistic and transformational education which addresses learning content and outcomes as well as pedagogy and the learning environment. It achieves its purpose by transforming society (UNESCO. 2014).

Conceptualising Global Citizenship Education within Lifelong Learning Context

There is no widely agreed definition of global citizenship. In all cases, global citizenship does not entail a legal status. It refers more to a sense of belonging to the global community and a common sense of humanity, with its presumed members experiencing solidarity and collective identity among themselves and collective responsibility at the global level. Global citizenship can be seen as an ethos or a metaphor rather than a formal membership.

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Being a framework for collective action, global citizenship can, and is expected to, generate actions and engagement among, and for, its members through civic actions to promote a better world and future.

Global citizenship education (GCED) aims to equip learners with the following core competencies:

- A deep knowledge of global issues and universal values such as justice, equality, dignity and respect.
- Cognitive skills to think critically, systemically and creatively, including adopting a multi-perspective approach that recognises different dimension, perspectives and angles of issues.
- Non-cognitive skills including social skills such as empathy and conflict resolution, communicative skills and aptitudes for networking and interacting with people of different backgrounds, origins, cultures and perspectives.
- Behavioural capacities to act collaboratively and responsibly and to strive for collective good (UNESCO. 2013).

Policy and Implementation Modalities on Literacy and Functional Literacy in Nigeria

In order to promote and sustain literacy within the lifelong learning context, policy makers in Nigeria must focus their policy design and implementation modalities on the following:

i. There is the need for education policy makers to see literacy from a lifelong learning perspective. In this regard, Nigeria must set the goal of literacy and the target date to achieve the goal. For example it can be stated thus: "*By 2045, every adult Nigerian will be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship*"
ii. Community Literacy Programmes- Community literacy involves the development of literacy and learning skills for any individual or group of individuals outside of the formal educational system. There is the need for more NGOs participation the delivery of community literacy in various forms.
iii. Identification and strengthening of different access points for literacy (e.g. libraries, internet cafés, health centres, employment offices, etc.). Through this literacy points, structured learning opportunities to sustain literacy activities can be created.
iv. A Change in the Literacy Goal- Instead of striving for the 'eradication of illiteracy' as a policy goal, policies should be oriented towards continuously sustaining and improving the development of literacy and numeracy competences while also encouraging people to learn new ones (e.g. digital competence).
v. Making Literacy the focus of National development Strategies- Literacy is a key condition for poverty reduction, inclusion and sustainable development. Empowerment of marginalised communities and community-based approaches to literacy for sustainable development should be made the focus of national development strategies. Literacy should, therefore, be promoted from a lifelong learning perspective, so that it can unfold its transformative potential.

Policy and Implementation Modalities on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Nigeria

Education for sustainable development (ESD) should be seen in the country as an integral and transformative element of inclusive quality education and lifelong learning. ESD is far more than teaching knowledge and principles related to sustainability. ESD, in its broadest sense, is education for social transformation with the goal of creating more sustainable societies. ESD touches every aspect of education including planning, policy development, programme implementation, finance, curricula, teaching, learning, assessment, administration. ESD aims to provide a coherent interaction between education, public awareness, and training with a view to creating a more sustainable future (UNESCO, 2012b).

In this regard, therefore, policy focus and implementation modalities should be instituted thus:

i. Development of a National Policy Framework for the implementation of environmental education and education for sustainable development. For examples, youth organizations can be motivated to build a

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global coalition for youth on sustainable lifestyles; business organisations can be equally mandated to integrate ESD in their corporate social responsibility activities.

ii. Integration of environmental education and education for sustainable development at all structures of the educational system.

iii. Launching of environmental and education for sustainable campaign across the country.

iv. Prodding of six Universities (one from each geo-political zone of the country) to spearhead research, innovation, and implementation of environmental education and education for sustainable development.

v. Involvement of ministries, departments, agencies, civil societies, and NGOs to improve their working in favour of environmental education and education for sustainable development. Local governments should also be mandated to set up ESD centres.

Policy and Implementation Modalities Global Citizenship Education (GCED)

Considering that global citizenship education concerns global affairs and challenges, people erroneously tend to think it is an education mainly for "mature" students in post-primary levels. However, this is not the case. The most challenging dimension of global citizenship education is the socio-emotional dimension that has to do with the formation of attitudes and values.

Information and knowledge can be acquired through classroom learning, but values, belief systems and attitudes are formed through accumulated experiences and socialization processes. They are acquired through the learners' developmental process rather than the schooling process. Everybody, young and adults can be re-oriented to acquire the right mindsets for global citizenship.

Global citizenship education must not to be understood as an independent subject area. It is an education that promotes the core values of global citizenship, namely non-discrimination, respect for diversity and solidarity for humanity. Therefore, policy focus and implementation modalities should be instituted thus:

i. The core values of global citizenship education must be reflected in and supported by education policy and the curriculum in order to deliver global citizenship education effectively.

ii. Electronic media institutions should be mandated to develop programmes to sensitise people on participation in community activities and the need to interact with populations of different backgrounds or of different views.

iii. Media institutions should also create the awareness of how people should reflect and practice the core values of GCED in their daily lives. The fundamental spirit of global citizenship education is learning to live together. It promotes respect for diversity and solidarity for humanity. This ethos can be practiced locally.

iv. Every work organisation, educational or non-educational, public or private, should be mandated to develop policy framework on the core values of GCED and how the framework will be implemented in the organisation among the different population with different backgrounds and different views.

v. The Use of Sport-based Approach to deliver GCED- Sports can create deep and long-lasting lessons in justice, tolerance, diversity and human rights. They can promote social values and goals of collaboration, persistence and fair play. Because sports also promote social cohesion and mutual understanding and respect, they can also be used to promote diversity and conflict resolution. National sporting events such as the league and National Sports Festival, among others, have the ability to transcend local and national identities, politics, socio-economic status, culture and ethnicity, and unite people through competition alongside solidarity on a national scale. The various sporting associations in Nigeria can be mandated to initiate values education programme (VEP) to promote values-based learning on and off the field of play in life.

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Policy and Implementation Modalities on Adult Learning, Education and Training Opportunities

Developing countries and countries with transition economies risk being further marginalised in a competitive global knowledge economy if their education and training systems are not equipping learners with the skills they need. To respond to the problem, policymakers need to make fundamental changes to education and training opportunities. There is the need for a new type of learning that promotes creating, applying, analysing, and synthesising knowledge and engaging people in collaborative learning throughout their lifespan. It should be emphasised that access to adult learning, education and training is inequitable and its coverage is insufficient.

Therefore, to improve the implementation modalities of adult learning, education and training opportunities, the following suggestions are put forward:

i. Significant investment in Capacity Building-There is the need for significant change in the financing of capacity building and development processes. Capacity building fund, similar to pension fund, can be enacted by law requiring the deduction of 3% from workers income while the employers also contribute 3% on each worker for capacity building investment. Workers can then be compelled to go for capacity building programmes of their choice at least twice in a year, using the fund accruing form the investment and managed by designated administrators.

ii. Exposure of Workers to Acquisition of Workplace Core Skills – In order to compete in a global economy, workers must be exposed to certain core skills. Every organisation- private and public- should be mandated to provide training opportunities for workers to acquire core skills for work development such as: managing career and work life, working with roles, rights and protocols, communicating for work, connecting and working with others, recognising and utilising diverse perspectives, planning and organising, making decisions, identifying and solving problems, creating and innovating, and digital literacy.

iii. Provision of Distance Learning Opportunities- In order to build, enhance, or update knowledge and skills requirements of people, learning opportunities must be widened through the distance learning approach. Single and dual-mode distance learning institutions should design flexible learning programme, of varying duration: with a maximum of three months, for all categories of people willing to acquire more knowledge or sharpen their managerial, marketing, entrepreneurial, employability skills.

Conclusion

The demands of a lifelong learning system are enormous. Nigeria must therefore develop a strategy for moving forward in a systematic and sequenced fashion. An important step is for the country to identify where she stands particularly with respect to its international peers. There must be a fundamental recognition of the entire citizenry- children, adults, women, girls, boys- as very central to the process of development. Formal education is insufficient to achieve this process of development. Adult education, literacy, education for sustainable development, citizenship education, and adult learning and training opportunities must be combined.

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