

## THE RELEVANCE AND PROMOTION OF DIGITAL LEARNING AMONG ADULT LEARNERS IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*Digital learning is the new and modern way of learning that comprises the use of different devices or application such as computer, radio, television, cellular phone and network hardware and software to bring renovation into learning. It also involves the use of different learning modes and satellite system which encourages video conferencing and distance learning. Digital learning has brought about new dimension of interaction and idea into learning environment globally without stress. Digital learning needs to be promoted and embraced in adult education in order to make the discipline and adult learning more relevant in the present situation and for adult learners to be able to compete in digitalization era. It is on this basis that the study focus on the concept of promoting digital learning and its relevance to adult education and adult learners. The paper concludes with recommendations to promote digital learning in adult education and to give room for dynamism in the profession. Also, in order to make adult learners to be more relevant in the societies and to be more productive with the new trend of ICT, digital learning must be promoted and embraced in adult education.*

**Keywords:** *Relevance, Promotion, Digital learning, Adult education and Adult learners.*

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## **Introduction**

Over the past decades, digital learning, also known as Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), have become more and more embedded in our everyday lives and they have produced rapid changes in society by fundamentally transforming the way people work, communicate and have access to information, government/public services, education and entertainment. Increasingly, a wide range of services, administration, businesses and citizenship processes are transferred online. In addition, ICT are perceived to be inherent to the reform efforts necessary for the 21st century society and adult education cannot be left behind.

In the last two decades, there is rapid advancement of digital learning which radically affected citizens' individual and social lives and transformed the industrial centred society to a new, dynamic society described as information society, knowledge society or global universal society. This promotes new challenges to most adults, as they have to constantly keep up with the changes around them. Adult learners need to update their knowledge for skills improvement, job advancement, personal growth and understanding more than ever (Lawson, 2005). Career and job changes are common place, and as a consequence, adults must be able to acquire new skills so that they can succeed and survive (Attanasois and Maria 2010).

Humanity is currently experiencing constant political, economic, cultural, and social changes produced by the interaction and use of technology (Jose and Leonardo (2019). However, adults are not considered digital natives, but digital immigrants, since they do not know the functioning of the technological means of communication and information, becoming passive consumers of technology in Nigeria. This condition is attributed to the different circumstances and obstacles that adults experience in their daily lives, causing alienation due to the technological changes produced by the appearance of the internet and other information and communication technologies (Jacobs 2014). Nowadays, adults can be considered digital illiterates if they does not possess the technical skills or lack the competence related to the search and use of information. This is why adults, regardless of theirs experience or background, should reduce the digital divide and acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to achieve personal, economic and social success in the 21st century (Yusuf 2006 & Jose and Leonardo 2019). Educational policy directives and initiatives in most developed countries have articulated clear and unambiguous statements about integrating ICT in everyday education practice in order to inform citizens about the knowledge and skills needed to participate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century's knowledge society. ICT is also considered the driving force for widening adults' participation in learning and lifelong learning initiatives (Gorard, Selwyn, & Madden, 2003; Mason, 2006), facilitating flexible learning in terms of time and distance, and thereby establishing opportunities and conditions for a "learning society" for all.

A critical factor in reducing inequalities and ensuring people's inclusion in the social, economic and political life of their communities and societies is increasing ICT usage by both young people and adults so that they have an influence over their own life chances. It has become apparent that digital literacy is not just about using the computer and the growing interest about the Internet and mobile technologies but it is all about been

effective in daily usage to be relevant in the society. Undoubtedly, ICT training motivates people to develop literacy, numeracy and language skills. Moreover, ICT competency is necessary not only for citizens to function efficiently on a personal level, but also to develop, advance and succeed in their professional lives, and become active citizens in the information age, thus contributing to social and economic success (Fakinlede et al 2014 & Attanasois & Maria 2015).

Adult education according to UNESCO (2006) is an entire body of educational process whatever the content, level or method whether formal or informal as well as apprenticeship. Furthermore, Jarvis (2004) defines adult education as the entire range of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or informal, that are intended primarily for persons who have passed the age of compulsory education, excluding initial education in schools, colleges and universities. It also refers to a set of intentional and planned educational activities designed to address the learning needs and goals of individuals who have passed the age of compulsory education (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). It is aimed at promoting lifelong learning, enhancing personal and professional development, and improving the social, cultural, and economic well-being of adult learners (Tight, 2012). Obidiegwu (2013) defines adult education as any educational activity that caters for the needs of adults to improve their performance in specific areas of adult life to improve their living standard. He describes it as an organised and purposeful educational activity designed for adults for their personal and societal fulfilment within and outside the school. Adult education enables the adult to adapt to constant changing global requirements and needs to solve present and emerging problems which may include health, environment, economic, social and political problems to get them integrated into the society and avoid exclusion and marginalization.

Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) is a basic life skills education and training programme offered to adults. This type of education includes the acquisition of basic skills of literacy and numeracy. It also provides opportunities for life long-learning and development (Hinzen 2002). It encompasses a wide range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities undertaken by adults and out of school youth, resulting in the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to enhance the quality of life. Corner (2000) says that ABET provides adults with the necessary skills required to lead to a better life. Through ABET adult learners acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes useful to their daily lives like, health skills, safety skill, and income generating skills. ABET is inevitably the most wide-ranging, heterogeneous and imprecise of all categories of educational provision. Unlike others (primary schooling or higher education, for example), adult education and training does not cater for any particular academic level. It is provided by a large number of dissimilar agencies, and the age span it covers is exceptionally wide (Mac Gregor 2008).

Adult education can be literally described as forms of learning experiences in which adults participate. Obidiegwu and Obiozor (2013) asserts that adult education refers to all organized and purposeful educational activities designed for adults for their personal and societal fulfillment within or out of school which will enable them to adapt to the

constant changing global requirements and needs in order to get them integrated into society and avoid exclusion and marginalization. The concept of adult education is broad and loose. It has wide coverage in terms of activities. In Nigeria context and globally, the components and characteristics of adult education include the following:

1. It must have a minimum of educational components: Adult education must have education components with aim of adding value to the learners. This will enable the learner to submit and receive from the facilitator.
2. It must be intentional, deliberately organized, and systematic enterprising: Adult learners that come to undergo classes at adult education centres must have intention to come and add skills and knowledge to move them forward. They need to be deliberate and determine as well, otherwise they may drop along the way. The learning must be systematic enterprising to encourage the learners with goals of adding value to them.
3. It is also the activity outside of the school system: In Nigeria context, adult education is not only taking place in classrooms but also outside the centre environment because of its nature. The learners need a times to learn one skill or vocation outside the classroom. They may a times go to the extent of visiting places to learn in order to achieve their aims.
4. Its activities are relevant to meet the situation needs of the participants: Since adult learners' needs are different, adult education needs to be diversify and meet individual needs.
5. It is also linked with the intention to improve personal living, whether in social or in economic terms, and with national development as a whole (Brockarie, 1991; & UNESCO, 2001).

Adults are very complex individuals. They go through many developmental stages as they move from early to late adulthood. Gravett (2001) states that all adults do not necessarily possess the attributes or abilities ascribed to adulthood. However, because the status that is attached to adulthood is normative, they are expected to possess these attributes. Each adult learner brings his or her unique characteristics to the learning situation. Adult learners' socio-cultural environment comes in to play as an adult's life experience has been accumulated within and in interaction with a socio-cultural environment. So, while each adult has qualities and experiences that are unique, each also shares common concerns with other adults. Some of these commonalities have to do with age, social status and educational background (Dabesaki, 2006).

Knowles (1998) refers to an adult learner as an adult person who is involved in education. It can be basic education or further studies. He identifies adults by two criteria. An adult learner is an individual who performs roles associated by culture with adults, and an individual who perceives himself or herself to be responsible for his own life. Center for Domestic Preparedness, CDP (2004) affirms that despite adult learning being a relatively new area of study, great strides have been made toward understanding how adults learn. Although more remains to be discovered, much knowledge exists to guide the design and

teaching of courses for adult learners. Part of being an effective instructor involves understanding how adults learn best.

When addressing adult learners, CDP suggests that certain assumptions can be made:

1. *Adults are goal-oriented*—upon enrolling in a course, adults usually know what goal they want to achieve. Therefore, they appreciate an educational program that is organized and has clearly defined elements. Instructors must show adults how this class will help them attain their goals. This classification of goals and course objectives must be done early in the course.
2. *Adults are relevancy-oriented*—Adults see reasons for learning something. Learning has to be applicable to their work or other responsibilities to be of value to them. Therefore, instructors must identify objectives for adult students before the course begins. This also means that theories and concepts must be related to a setting familiar to adults. Letting adult learners choose projects that reflect their own interests will fulfil this need.
3. *Adults are practical*—Adults focus on the aspects of a lesson that are most useful to them in their work. It may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake. Instructors must tell adult learners explicitly how the lesson will be useful to them on the job.

As people mature, they usually become more autonomous and self-directed, needing to be free to direct themselves. Their instructors actively involve adult learners in the learning process and serve as facilitators for them. Specifically, they must discover learners' perspectives about what topics to cover and let them work on projects that reflect their interests. Adult learners are seen as more self-directed, having knowledge and have gained life experiences that provide the foundation for learning. In Nigeria, for instance, adults are ready to learn and having orientation to learn which is problem-centered. Adult learners in tertiary institutions are distinct in the sense that their aims are related to personal growth and development in relation to their occupation and careers preparedness. They undergo course or training in order to sustain the democratic society and to improve their social structure. Those that are working have opportunity to further their education through open distance education which makes them to learn at their own pace irrespective of time, space and distance. The concept of an adult learner has been defined differently by different scholars. Madu and Obiozor (2020) view an adult learner as a person who engages in any type of learning activities in order to deal with issues in life. An adult learner can be defined as a person undertake any flexible educational programme with intent to upgrade his knowledge, skills, values, attitude and be able to solve life problems (Obidiegwu, 2016).

Similarly Adebola (2014) defines an adult learner as a person who is matured and engages in any learning activity. Learning activities for adult learners may be scheduled in day and evening time. It includes residential courses, weekend programmes, and job training courses, extension work, seminars, workshops, conferences, community programmes and web programmes. An adult learner therefore, is any adult who engages

in any learning activities in order to improve and increase his or her knowledge, attitudes values, skills and potentials (Madu & Obiozor, 2020). Hence, adult learners who are matured must embrace digital learning and engage themselves in any educational activity (formal, non- formal or informal) for self- development. Braodbent and Poon (2015) postulate that adult learners learn better when they have self- regulated ability to control, manage and plan their learning actions.

### **Concept of digital literacy and its relevance in Adult Education in Nigeria**

Adult Digital Literacy Acquisition can provide new insights into multi-literacies. The examination of adults' digital literacy acquisition offers a new way of thinking about multi-literacies which is the use of digital tools for making meaning and accessing the world, and the nature of digital literacy. Kress (2003) & Luke (2000) has worked on multi-literacy in the new media age which makes it relevant for adult education in particular and it must be embraced. The focus of this column over the past two years has been on adolescents and what digital tools and multi-literacies mean for adults (Luke, (2000), Kress, (2003), Athanassios, (2015) & Maria, (2011). Digital learning is vital and aims at helping adult learners in Nigeria in many ways:

1. It helps to acquire the necessary technical knowledge and skills that make them able to use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) effectively and to function effectively in their communities. This will enable them to have necessary skills that will make them to be relevant in life.
2. The adult learners will be competent in using ICT to solve problems of everyday life since they will have understanding of the social dimensions and the impact of ICT in our modern society. It will make them to be more relevant in the society.
3. Digital literacy will cultivate positive attitudes regarding ICT and to face the demands of modern age in Nigeria.

However, in the framework above, digital literacy is seen in a broader way than just computer use and familiarization with various ICT environments (hardware devices, software tools and applications, digital content). In other words, it refers not only to the knowledge and skills of using a wide range of ICT environments but also to those skills related to accessing, processing, analyzing, evaluating, applying and communicating information. Over the past decade in Nigeria, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have become more and more embedded in our everyday lives and they have produced rapid changes in society by fundamentally transforming the way people work, communicate and have access to information, government/public services, education and entertainment.

Academics, researchers, educators, experts and policy officers in Nigeria have acknowledged digital skills as one of the key competences for work force, lifelong development and active participation in social and economic life. The main argument is that people who can understand and effectively use digital means and facilities are significantly empowered and advantaged in terms of educational opportunities and success, professional development, employment prospects, civic participation and many other aspects of their personal and social life (e.g. public and social services, cultural and



everyday practices, online shopping, social networking). The masses are marginalized and the accessibility and utilization of ICT are increasingly considered as the critical factor in widening participation in learning and life-long learning and, thereby establishing opportunities and conditions for a 'learning society' for all. On the other hand, it seems quite clear that the amount of online government, public and social services will be consistently growing. Considering the rapid demographic changes in our modern societies (e.g. a growing number of older people), ICT could offer solutions for the needs of older people to be constructive participants in modern society by easier access to social and healthcare services, contact with family and friends, opportunities to contribute to political, civic and social life, which are not available to adult education in Nigeria.

However, 21st century literacy demands have changed along with changes in society and technology. In order to be literate in today's media-rich environments in Nigeria, both young people and adults, need to develop knowledge, values and a wide range of critical thinking, communication and information management skills. Therefore, there is a critical need to conceptualize digital literacy beyond the simple notion related to the use of computers and the Internet. The researcher explores how the concept of digital literacy was emerged and how it has been related to the demands of our modern society, i.e. to become informed and active citizens, well-prepared employees and lifelong learners. Digital literacy is considered as the convergence between computer and ICT literacy, information literacy, media literacy and visual literacy.

Therefore, digital literacy reflects a wide range of skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes about purposeful, critical, safe and creative use of ICT to achieve goals related to personal development, education, employment, entertainment, inclusion and many other social participation and civic engagement activities. It is a broad concept reflecting the awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use ICT tools in the context of specific life, work and learning situations (Bawden, 2008; UNESCO, 2001). In Nigeria context, digital literacy especially in adult education need to be embraced and all efforts must put in place so that adult learners will not be left out of the new trend in the society. Efforts must be made to provide the necessary facilities and the training of facilitators. When facilitators are computer literate, they will be able to teach and guide adult learners to be computer literate too.

### **How to promote digital learning in Adult Education in Nigeria**

In the context of Adult education in Nigeria because of high rate illiterate especially among the adults, there is need to improve the level of literacy and digital learning should be promoted and encouraged in adult education so that the adult learners can be relevant in the new trend in the national development. This will enable communities to have new dispensation about the discipline and make adult learners to be able to fit and be relevant because of the new knowledge that they will have through digital learning.

According to Yusuf (2006) & Fakinlede (2014), digital learning can be practices and promoted in the following ways:

1. Digital learning should involve ICT competence tasks, based on active and discovery learning, combining digital knowledge, operational and strategic skills, digital culture and societal aspects of ICT. There should be free access and utilization of ICT to all especially the adult learners. Incentives can be given to students especially the adult learners to have access to ICT. Computers and other facilities can be loan and learners can pay back the loan in installments.
2. Multi-literacy sessions, involving two or more literacies, designed to support task-based and cross-thematic learning, information and operational skills, inquiry and reflection. This will enable mutual interaction among adults and digital learning will be encouraged through interactions and learning of skills. It will also give opportunities to learners to learn different skills and vocations.
3. ICT-based projects, with the aim to support constructivist and collaborative learning, information and strategic skills, critical and analytical thinking, problem solving skills, and digital culture development in adult education. This will promote digital skills and development of literacies among adult learners.

For adult learning digital literacy is fast becoming a prerequisite for citizens to fully participate in society in Nigeria. To acquire the skills and knowledge is necessary in order to enhance learning, creativity, innovation and employment opportunities. Fostering digital literacy means that adults should be able to go beyond the functional and the operational digital features and acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and personal values by using a wide range of technologies collaboratively, creatively and critically within life situations, which may include personal development, lifelong learning, work, social participation, active citizenship, entertainment and other aspects of everyday life. Education and training on digital literacy should not concentrate only on the young generation. It appears that the general population lacks the skills to keep up and the majority of adults who are already past the formal education phase have enhanced needs to develop their digital competence (European Commission 2008; Obidiegwu & Obiozor 2013).

Improving adult digital literacy levels is fundamental in the sense that it motivates adults to develop literacy and language skills, numeracy, scientific and cultural literacy. This in turn contributes to strengthening human capital and bridges the digital divide and confronts exclusion and marginalization that comes with increased ICT-mediated activities in modern social life in Nigeria. As digital practices are being developed by users themselves, new skills and needs are created through these practices. Therefore, there is an imperative need for organized societies and educational systems to ensure and support equal access to the critical aspects of digital literacy for all groups of citizens in Nigeria. There are many groups at risk of digital exclusion among adults e.g. elderly, unemployed, low-skilled, low-income, immigrants (Jimoyiannis & Gravani (2011). Digital Literacy and Adult Learners policy should address the organization of educational



programs to increase their interest, skills and confidence for digital participation in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of digital literacy has promoted and proposed the convergence of computer and ICT literacy, information literacy, media literacy and visual literacy to prepare active citizens and lifelong learners. The proposed operational framework is sufficiently flexible to be tailored and applied into different digital literacy programs of adult education in Nigeria. Undoubtedly, there are still many issues that need to be clarified and a study regarding the way digital literacy is been perceived in adult education in Nigeria is imperative. Future study could look at the adult learners' difficulties when using computers and solving problems with ICT, as well as the appropriate ways that should be used by educators to support and encourage adults learning with ICT. There is need for adult learners to be adequately equipped with skills and confidence towards digital learning in Nigeria. Adult education beneficiaries especially the adult learners must not see themselves as marginalised. In the process of belonging to the new trend of development in Nigeria and globally, their interest in digital learning should be positive.

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