



## Re-thinking adult basic education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines adult basic education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world. The study identifies a new paradigm in response to global changes particularly concerning employment. Preparation for additional training as the basis for basic education for adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The study also indicates that there is relationship between literacy, environment and development.*

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## Introduction

Globalization has many consequences which include unemployment. Global unemployment stood at 6.1 percent in 2015. Over 900 million workers are without descent jobs and about 200 million unemployed are in the world (Eroke, 2012). This is a threat to the global economy according to International Labour Organization (ILO). There is need to provide basic education for the teeming adult population without adequate basic skills, in order for them to function effectively in the knowledge-based economy. The knowledge-based economy and competitiveness in the global market require individuals that can profit from additional training. These are the training opportunities that help individuals to keep abreast with technological changes that are associated with their work environment (Jarvis, 2004). Basic education caters for this by providing them opportunities to learn and re-learn, without which, it is difficult to benefit from additional training. The aim of this paper is to examine adult basic education in a global context.

## **Global Changes**

Social changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world is largely due to globalization. Globalization is a multi-dimensional concept (Obioma, 2011), a situation in which service, people, investment, firms, technologist move back and forth across nations. It exerts a great influence on the economic and social landscapes among nation states (Shizha and Abdi, 2009). The three dimensions of globalization are; the scientific and technological, the geo-political and the economic and financial. The technological and scientific aspect involves technological innovations in the field of communication, biotechnology and microelectronics. The geo-political dimension concerns the global influence on industrial, monetary and fiscal policy across nations. The economic and financial dimension deals with issues concerning the movement of goods and services, people and capital across the world, Tilak, (2003).

Its distinctive features are open marketization of production and free movement of financial capital (Shizha and Abdi, 2009) implying competition. Individuals communities, and nations may not have adequately those skills and capabilities required to gain access to wider markets, modern technology etc., and to compete favourably in international trade. Based on this, globalization is equated with unemployment.

## **Global Unemployment**

Unemployment has become a major phenomenon in the world. The global unemployment rate is significantly high at 6.1 percent in 2015. Unemployment rate rose from 5 percent in 2007 to 9 percent in 2011 in United States; from 8.6 percent to 21.52 percent in Spain, from 5.3 to 8.1 percent in United Kingdom, and from 8.01 percent to 18.4 percent during the period of debt crisis in Europe (Salami, 2013).

According to him, unemployment within the African continent is generally high, at 17.5 percent in Botswana, 25 percent in Angola, 11.7 percent in Kenya and 23.9 percent in Nigeria. As reported by International Labour Organization (ILO), opportunities for descent jobs are slim in Africa. It stressed the need to create jobs to absorb 900 million workers without descent jobs globally” The report points out that over 200 million jobless are in the world (Eroke, 2012). It is most likely that many of these people have been by passed by the knowledge economy as a result of too little education to form the foundation on which new and greater capability could be built (Perry and Sherlock, 2008).

## **The Need for Adult Basic Education**

As a result of the new work environment created by globalization in both national and global economy, there are many individuals, and businesses whose basic skills cannot tally with employment conditions (Jarvis, 2004). Education and training is required, for example, to enable them adapt to technology, understand new technologies and benefit from their usages. The need for adult basic education is in helping them so that they can gain from “additional training” that meets their needs (UNESCO, 2000) and learn new ways of doing things. The form of adult basic education required for this is not only different but unique and has not yet become a practice in the educational system of most countries of the world.

### **Concept of Adult Basic Education**

Adult Basic education addresses the basic learning needs of adults in their social economic and cultural context. UNESCO (2000: 222) defines adult basic education as:

*...all forms of organized education and training that meet the basic learning needs of adults, including literacy and numeracy, as well as the general knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that they require to survive, develop their capabilities, live and work in dignity, improve the quality of their lives, make informal decisions and continue learning.*

This definition suggests that; basic education is flexible and must meet basic learning needs and requirements in all societies. In United Kingdom, adult basic education involves literacy, numeracy and life skills (Advisory council for Adult and Continuing Education, (1979b) cited in Jarvis (2004). It also includes workplace and basic skills training. In Canada, the goal of adult basic education is to provide participants skills needed for livelihoods, to access labour market and to continue learning (Clague, 1972). It is functional education and often involves practical activities. Adult basic education is for social change, world peace and international citizenship.

### **The Roles of Adult Basic Education in the Society**

Adult basic education has several roles, DVV (2010) identifies the followings as the roles of adult basic education:

- i) It opens avenues of communication that would otherwise be closed, expands personal choice and controls over one's environment and is necessary for the acquisition of many other skills.
- ii) It gives people access to information through both print and electronic media, equips them to cope better with work and family responsibilities and changes the images they have about themselves.
- iii) It strengthens people's self-confidence to participate in community affairs and influence political issues.
- iv) It is the key with which individuals can unlock the full ranges of their talents and realize their creative potentials.
- v) It gives disadvantaged people the tools they need to move from exclusion to full participation in the society.
- vi) It empowers entire workers nations because educated citizens and workers have the skills required to make democratic institutions work effectively.
- vii) It helps the society to meet the demand for a more sophisticated work force
- viii) It makes for a cleaner environment.
- ix) It helps individuals carry out their obligations as parents and citizens.

### **A New Paradigm for 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

According to Lauder, Brown, Dillabough & Halsey (2006), “education must consider how the content and mature organization for knowledge grows out of the practical demands of social life and how that content is used and modified in its actual use”. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century adult basic education embraces a paradigm shift in favour of fundamental education, entrepreneurship training and computer education. This is not yet implemented in many countries for adults.

### **Fundamental Education**

Fundamental education involves improvements in the normal activities engaged by people which may be economic, social, political or cultural. It requires to adapt education to “a wide range of issues, such as health, education, domestic and vocational skills, knowledge and understanding of the human environment, including economic and social organization, law and government”, (Boel, 2013). It incorporates modern society values, such as personal judgement and initiative, freedom from fear and fatalism, empathy and tolerance. Fundamental education is synonymous with social learning. Teaching techniques include group dynamics, cooperative reading, discussion sessions and study circles (Nzeneri, 2006).

### **Entrepreneurship Training**

Entrepreneurship training is required to help individuals, firms and nations improve in the area of business skills, knowledge, abilities and motivation. Such skills, knowledge and abilities include knowledge of business opportunities and how to mobilize both human and material resources to engage them (Idu, 2011). Programmes are developed based on the local and global business environments.

### **Computer Education**

Computer education requires the learning of the new literacies of the digital age. It involves the essential component skills. Gruba (2004) asserts that “the use of digital information is a stepping stone to being literate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It embraces knowledge of specific hardwares and softwares’ applications. It has four different branches: the skills, textual practices, socio-political and information.

The skills brand is designed to help learners use digital literacy as a means to benefiting from further training programmes. The textual practice perspective exposes learners to knowledge of how to apply hypertext and computer technologies in textual practices. The information aspect helps to develop abilities of individuals to recognize when information is needed and how to locate, evaluate and use effectively the information available. The socio-political dimension assists learners learn to adapt learning to cultural context, to enhance integration of skills with individual’s day to day activities. It involves collaboration among learners (Gruba, 2004).

### **Literacy, Environment and Development**

Environment and development are closely related to each other. Global environment suggests that without adequate care, development may be hampered now as well as in future (UNESCO 2000).

The requirement of addressing the challenge of protecting the environment which has already exceeded its carrying capacity involves basic skills, particularly literacy. Literacy is the minimum educational experience owing to the fact that high proportions of illiterates can be found in most parts of the world.

### Conclusion

There is evidence that unemployment is growing globally. Globalization is equated with unemployment. Adult basic education potential approach to this is in providing fundamental education, entrepreneurship training and computer education. Literacy, environment and development are connected. Thus literacy is a tool for development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most countries in the world are ill-equipped to address global changes. The public and private sectors must work together to bring their educational systems up to date to match their national and global employment needs.

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