

African Universities and Community Relevance: The Role of Continuing Education

Gbolagade Adekanmbi

adexcomby@gmail.com

Independent Researcher

P. O. Box 5061

Gaborone, Botswana

Abstract: *This paper examines the role and community relevance of African universities, against the backdrop of similar developments in the developed world. The paper submits that the demystifying of university education and the widening of tertiary education access have not been the preserve of foreign universities. Universities in sub-Saharan Africa, especially those with a British colonial past, right from inception, pursued a 'marriage of the town and the gown', and sought to be relevant to their communities. This paper discusses the models and programmes of continuing education in sub-Saharan African universities, the challenges faced, and possible mitigation. It addresses the need for enhancing technology and understanding continuing education uniqueness; suggests its usefulness in addressing new sustainable development goals; and defends its continued use for accessing education. The paper also asks for the need to avail resources for it, explore new approaches and utilize existing and new global collaborative opportunities for its promotion.*

Keywords: *African Universities, University Outreach, Continuing Education, Sustainable Development, Sub-Saharan Africa*

Introduction

A number of factors have contributed to the emergence and growth of continuing education in African universities. These include colonial and historical factors, socio-political expediency, the allure of innovation, pecuniary benefits as well as technology and its possible applications. The dogged tenacity of protagonists has also played a major role.

Many universities in African countries colonized by Britain, upon establishment, set up units of extra-mural studies and later, adult education, as 'windows on the walls' of their university. Such arrangements enabled the communities to benefit from the universities through the programmes organized for such communities. At the social and political level, universities have always had a major responsibility to respond to the social and cultural context in which they operate, recognizing its mores and demands. Related to this is the expectation for governments to meet unsatisfied educational needs of their citizens. Since the colonial arrangements were unable to fully enable university education for all who needed it, to the point of meeting the demands for university place for Africans, post-colonial governments felt a social responsibility to meet such a need. Political expediency thus meant that such governments had to rely on the universities to,

through adult continuing education programmes, pursue new vistas of hope for the educationally challenged. With time, such universities themselves, due to limited resources, looked for third revenue streams to address their budgetary problems. In addressing dwindling budgets, other avenues for monetary support were sought through continuing education programmes. At another level, protagonists of distance education, first, through correspondence education, recognized that education can be innovatively availed by correspondence, the same way Paul used didactic letters in the Bible for his new converts and disciples. With teaching thus becoming possible by post and other means of communication, innovative pedagogical practices emerged. Such innovations soon took on other dimensions, including the use of other media, often different from the traditional ones common in the early classrooms. With new developments in digital technology, new pedagogical applications also became possible. These highlighted factors ultimately found leverage in adult and continuing education, which, by its flexible nature, is a route for trying out something novel.

Against this backdrop, this paper explores the rationale for continuing education use, and its dimensions of practice in African universities. In the paper, the writer discusses the role of continuing education in such universities, as a way of enhancing community relevance. Also examined are a few models of continuing education, and how universities can utilise continuing education to promote teaching and learning. The writer submits that modern African universities can only despise continuing education at their own peril. Although the writer draws examples from other milieu, the main context of discourse in this paper is sub-Saharan Africa.

The Context of study

Africa accounts for a fifth of the world's land area and sub-Saharan Africa, host to 46 countries, accounts for two thirds of the African land area (Mandryk, 2010). Sub-Saharan Africa also accounts for 12% of the global population (UNDP, 2015). The adult literacy rate for those 15 years and older in the sub continent stands at 58.4% with the world average at 81.2% (UNDP, 2015). A possible gradual decline in population has been observed and the International Labour organisation has reported that the region is in 'the early stages of a demographic transition'. Current participation rate in tertiary education in sub-Saharan Africa is put at 8% (UNDP, 2015). It is interesting to note the rates for 2015 for the following countries: South Korea 98%, USA and Finland 94%, Libya 61%, Egypt 39%, South Africa 20%, Botswana, 18% and Sudan's is 17% (UNDP, 2015). Many sub-Saharan African countries have rates lower than the sub-Saharan average. This poses a challenge in terms of provision of access to university education on the sub-continent.

A growth in the African economy has been reported, said to be at an annual rate of 5% and is considered 'one of the fastest growing in the world' (ILO, 2015). More than a third of the countries in the region actually 'achieved growth rates of at least 6%' (UNDP, 2013), even with poverty levels considered the highest globally. However, the International Labour Organisation has noted that the unemployment rate was 7.4% in 2015, a slight growth when compared to the 7.3% rate in 2014 (ILO, 2015). According to the ILO (2016), youth unemployment was actually 10% in 2014 and 11% in 2015.

Although 41% of students in sub-Saharan countries attended secondary school in 2014, up from 26% in 2000, many students still aim to travel out of the continent to greener pastures for higher education. Sub-Saharan Africa is reported to have ‘the highest emigration rate globally’, at the rate of 1.5%, against a global rate of 1%. Of this and other educational challenges faced by African youth, ILO notes:

‘many African students have interrupted periods of education alternating with significant work breaks, exposing them to informal work and making it more difficult for them to acquire either proper academic qualification or quality work experience’ (ILO, 2016:34)

On teacher training, gaps have been observed between demand and supply as the actual number of teachers in sub-Saharan Africa in 2011 was 3, 190,000 where a projected figure of 5, 290,000 teachers for the primary education level is required by 2030 (UNDP 2015). At the lower secondary school level, the number of teachers in the region in 2011 was 1,096, 000 against a total of 3, 637, 000 required (UNDP, 2015). Related to this is the demand for physicians, nurses and midwives where in the region, the number for 2012 was 1, 229, 000 against a model required figure of 3, 585, 000 personnel in that category. Such gaps in provisions of teachers, physicians, nurses and midwives can only be addressed through alternative educational approaches and methods. Continuing education as an alternative route to education can play a major role in such situations.

The observable trends in the general access to technology and its use globally shows that Africa is at a lower level than the rest of the world. A report by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) shows that only 20.8% of the total population have Internet access against a world average of 82.3% %. (ITU, 2015). However, ‘mobile subscriptions are predicted to rise substantially between 2013 and 2020’ (UNDP, 2015:89). Related challenges to the growth and use of technology are seen in the access to electricity. For example, it is reported that in Zimbabwe, the percentage of those without electricity is 59.5%, Kenya, 77% and South Africa, 14.6% (UNDP, 2015). A stream of ICT Development Index Rankings (IDI) is provided in Table 1, showing the trend in growth in Africa in relation to rankings globally.

Table 1. ICT IDI rankings in some sub-Saharan African countries. Source: ITU (2016)

Regional IDI Ranking	Country	IDI 2015	Global IDI Rank 2015
1	Mauritius	5.41	73
2	Seychelles	4.96	87
3	South Africa	4.90	88
4	Cape Verde	4.62	96
5	Ghana	3.90	109
6	Botswana	3.82	111
7	Namibia	3.41	118

8	Kenya	3.02	124
9	Zimbabwe	2.90	127
10	Lesotho	2.81	128
11	Senegal	2.68	132
12	Gabon	2.68	133
13	Nigeria	2.61	134
14	Gambia	2.60	135
15	Cote d'Ivoire	2.51	137

Overall, the picture in sub-Saharan Africa is that of unsatisfied educational demands at the tertiary level, relatively low adult literacy rates compared to the rest of the world and a digital divide often made worse by the absence of electricity supply. In such a context, alternative educational routes provide some kind of leeway for Africans.

The Concept and Models of Continuing Education

Continuing education as a term refers to the education a person has or receives after their initial education. Education cannot be had once and for all, and the school is incapable of providing all a person needs regarding knowledge for life (Illich, 1970; Reimer, 1971). There is always a need to address new challenges, update skills to manage new equipment and processes, in a world where vast amounts of new knowledge are created every second. Continuing education thus becomes a necessary tool to address perceived and real obsolescence in knowledge. In this regard, continuing education also creates an opportunity to pursue the goals of a learning society by promoting lifelong learning. Formal, informal and non-formal institutions exist as avenues for promoting continuing education, and universities are found to be avenues especially suited for the forms just listed.

Osborne and Thomas (2003) edited a seminal book on university continuing education in which they explored trends in the growth, practice and development of the genre. Thomas (2003) submits that the major goal of continuing education in the European Union is to bridge the learning divide. To this end, it is perceived and utilized in that context as education for adults returning to school, and is generally geared towards employment and related needs. Osborne (2003) and Pouget (2000) also note that it is used by technicians and engineers to help them keep abreast of developments in their fields.

A quick survey on the meanings attached to university continuing education is informing. While it is more broadly interpreted in the United Kingdom, determined by funding agencies, nature of provision and of credit or non-credit award status, in Austria, it is post-initial education (Osborne and Thomas, 2003). In Finland, it is seen as adult education, designed specially for adults over 25 years, which is true of Norway too, except that the emphasis in Norway is on 'secondary and non-formal education for adults' (Osborne and Thomas, 2003:521). In Sweden, it is 'higher education given irregularly and often with no academic accreditation attached'.

Noticeably, various professions such as medicine, engineering, pharmacy, law, actuary science, architecture have mapped out ways by which they promote continuing education in the fields. To this end, many professions have actually set up periodic examinations as points of professional entry into them or as regulations aimed at updating knowledge in the field, a requirement for continuing to engage in practice. Continuing education thus plays a major role in maintaining quality in many professions.

While a variety of institutions promote continuing education, universities, as apex points in knowledge building are highly placed to play major roles in the field. With a wide choice of disciplinary branches, universities are able to replicate many of their offerings and repackage them to address clientele needs, using a variety of operational models to have the needs addressed.

In exploring the manner in which continuing education has been practised in European universities, Osborne and Thomas (2003) have observed that the models of operations tend to reflect the university history, its clientele needs, nature of government intervention, institutional mission and strategy as well as policy directions of such institutions. Based on Brennan (2000), Osborne and Thomas put together a typology of university continuing education as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: A five-fold typology of organizational structures for UCE

Model	Form
A	UCE delivery through a separate department, centre or company, with or without expertise brought in from subject departments
B	UCE delivery as above and by a range of subject departments with a number of functions for UCE (e.g. development, monitoring, quality assurance) carried out by the UCE department)
C	UCE delivery entirely devolved to subject departments with strong central support through a range of functions e.g. strategic leadership, development, monitoring, quality assurance, promotion
D	UCE delivery devolved to subject departments with little or no central support, coordination or monitoring
E	UCE delivery through a consortium of institutions each contributing particular expertise towards collaborative UCE programmes

[University Continuing Education]. Source: Osborne and Thomas (2003)

A model refers to a representation of phenomenon or a frame of reference which shows how that phenomenon can be viewed and understood. Also, it helps to give an insight into the phenomenon's current or possible future use. Based on the models in Table 2, and with this author's insight, experience and practice over the years, it is submitted that continuing education at the university level in Africa utilizes the designated centre model, generalized model, consortium model, business model and an eclectic model (Adekanmbi, 2015b). These are now discussed below.

Designated Centre

This refers to a continuing education centre that has a degree of autonomy to hire a wide range of multi-disciplinary staff and develop and manage continuing education programmes. Such a centre would have its Director reporting directly to the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs or a similar officer at the management level, and even the University Senate. It is expected that such a centre would have direct access to university resources, and a host of recognized regulations which govern its operations, the hiring and promotion of its staff and the continuing growth of such staff through research and related avenues. The University of Botswana through its Centre for Continuing Education utilizes this model. Such a centre will however collaborate with other departments and faculties and additionally utilise expertise and experience available in such units. Such a centre may further establish units or departments that cater for literacy, extra-mural classes, public education, short courses, distance education and others. It may also run professional education programmes and engage in consultancy.

Generalised model

As in the scenario described above, a generalised model is one in which the university considers continuing education provision as being a mandate of every unit, department or faculty of the university. As such various departments run programmes peculiar to their discipline as forms of outreach, promote consultancies and run conferences along such lines. The strength of such an outfit is that the department or faculty is able to utilize its own resources, personnel and space during off hours for such activities. It is expected that provisions may be made in letters appointing staff to their post indicating these extra-curricular part of the expectations of staff. While this has been used in many cases, and allows for flexibility in utilizing the experience of staff, its reach has been generally limited and staff often complain about heavy work loads. It is however not uncommon to have a generalized model additionally used even where a designated centre exists, based on an overarching need for departments and other units of the university to provide professional service.

Consortium model

In this model, the expectation is that no particular unit or department owns the operations of continuing education, even though a department is expected to house operations locally. This centre of activities here is usually the Office of Outreach or the Office of one of the Deputy Vice Chancellors, for example that of Research and Innovation. Reliance is mostly on a collaboration of various institutions in the design, running and implementation of programmes. The goal is for universities to collaboratively utilise the relative strengths of each university or institution in pursuing an aspect of continuing education, and may lead to the award of joint degrees and certificates. Such require the signing of memoranda of agreement to determine goals of such collaboration, the roles expected of each group in the partnership, exit points in the arrangement, and the perceived and real levels of ownership in the operations. While this arrangement has been seen to help, especially where clients' needs have to be met, reliance on outside bodies for the implementation of core organizational activities can often be fraught with unexpected delays, cultural differences and a lack of common understanding of goals and aspirations of the institutions.

Business model

Many universities set up business or consultancy outfits and tender for continuing education programmes and research based work. The goal is to harness and utilize the expertise resident in the university to compete for jobs outside of the institution. Units so set up collaborate with local and international organisations and also engage in joint research proposals and work. These units may organize seminars, conferences, and are usually a source of funding for the institution.

Eclectic model

This model is a careful combination of all the models where the institution utilises distinct strengths of a model due to the objectives to be achieved at one particular time or the other. It is a flexible use of attributes of other models and is based on a drive to use what works at a particular time.

4. Continuing Education in African Universities

Many continuing education departments in African universities, especially those located in former British colonies have an interesting historical past. At inception, such African universities were mandated to create avenues for community members to benefit from the universities. In the *Asquith Report of the Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies*, published by the Colonial Office in 1945, the following quotations under the section Extra-Mural Studies are germane:

‘Something should therefore be done for those who would have profited by university education, but have passed the age for it...’ (p.18).

‘We hope that opportunity may be given through refresher courses and “summer schools” to persons engaged in administrative work, teaching, the health services, agriculture, to refresh, extend and bring up-to-date their knowledge’ (p. 19)

Following from the Asquith report, when the University College in Ibadan was set up in 1948, it had by 1949 established a division of extra-mural studies to organize itinerant lectures across the country, utilizing the expertise of its staff and sharing some knowledge of its institution with the public. The University of Botswana, established in 1971 replicated this by starting a Division of Extra-Mural studies following from its experience at the University of Botswana Lesotho and Swaziland, its immediate precursor. While the original intention was not to make these outreach arms academic, they eventually later combined both outreach and academic functions in their roles (Akinpelu, 1997). Similar developments were observed in Zambia, Ghana, Tanzania and Kenya. It should be noted that the University of Wisconsin in the USA, while pursuing outreach had what is called the Wisconsin idea, which was to ensure that the boundaries of the state were the boundaries of the university (Fordham, 1989). The goal was to make the university relevant to the community through programmes that can directly benefit the community and methods that enhance access and community participation. At another level, the starting of the UK Open University was to open up avenues to many who would never have had the opportunity to have university education by removing the formal entry qualifications and substituting this with only the age of entry, 21 years (Perry, 1976). Similarly, many distance education institutions which started out as correspondence based colleges in Britain, USA, Australia and others, were aiming to open up their institutions to the community. The early work of universities in Africa was thus meant to open up access, and engage in lifelong learning by making university education accessible to all.

The intervention of African universities in continuing education is rooted in the rationale of equity, inclusiveness, relevance and public relations. Akinpelu (1997) has carefully highlighted the justification of such outreach arms of the university, as being reflected in:

‘The pressure of the marketplace, in terms of social and economic demands for more widely-varied qualifications; and the pressure of equity in terms of expanded access to its traditionally limited facilities;

University continuing education serving as a way of meeting the demands of public and private, formal and non-formal sectors of the economy for practical and applied knowledge and skills;

While not duplicating the role of the university’s Public Relations Office, a good university continuing education programme is in a sense a reflector of the university because it could be the first, immediate and perhaps even the only source of direct contact with what

the university stands for...’

(p.15)

Many outreach units of these early African universities emerged from their initial purely liberal orientation to begin to undertake literacy and post literacy work, programmes such as social work, extra-mural classes, short courses, professional development programmes, distance education, credit courses, computer training, workshops, seminars and conferences, and a host of others. Also, a further role of raising public awareness to opportunities for lifelong learning was also being pursued.

In their edited work, *Adult and Continuing Education in Africa*, Indabawa, Oduaran, Afrik and Walters (2000) have explored the nature of this intervention, and presented experiences of various countries utilizing the gains in the field. The book reflects adult and continuing education intervention at governmental and non-governmental levels, and notes the roles of the university in such endeavours. Country case studies presented include submissions on Botswana, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Lesotho, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Additional interventions and perspectives are also explored.

Also, Aitchison and Alidou (2009) prepared a report on *The state and development of adult learning in sub-Saharan Africa: a Regional Synthesis* where they captured the dimensions of programmes and activities African embarked upon over the years to expand access and open up learning opportunities across the sub-continent. The report shows that many sub-Saharan African nations have various programmes aimed at promoting what is termed ‘further education’, a reference to continuing education. Many of such programmes, including those based within universities are reflected in happenings in Cape Verde, Madagascar, the Seychelles, Zambia, Burkina Faso, and Kenya, where a major focus on human resource development is seen. It is also noted that South Africa focuses on lifelong learning, Sierra Leone on non-formal education, while Botswana’s focus is on out of school education and training. The authors emphasize that tertiary level provisions are carried out by technical institutions, universities and other training agencies (Aitchison and Alidou, 2009). Many departments of adult and continuing, or non-formal education are actively involved in organizing professional development courses, sandwich programmes, workshops, conferences and seminars, in addition to their core disciplinary programmes of developing adult and continuing education personnel, at diploma, degree and graduate levels. Such programmes have specializations in human resource development, distance education, community development, social welfare, literacy, philosophy of adult education, history and economics of adult education, to mention a few. The goal of both the academic and outreach programmes is to develop personnel, address obsolescence in knowledge and promote continuity in industry. In the area of community education, many universities engage the community through training their students in the area of community development, and carry out, from time to time, direct participation in community development. The methods and media employed are also geared towards

promoting access and ease of interaction. A few specific examples of intervention will be shared in the next few paragraphs.

Developments in some universities in Southern, Eastern and West African regions point to a dimension of the intervention. Before its disestablishment in 2014, the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) of the University of the Western Cape, started in 1985, was deeply into adult education training, research and also provided support for many working class adults. Apart from publishing a wide range of books, primers and related resources, it was actively involved in resource mobilization for the community (Popular Education South Africa, 2016). The activities of this Centre have now been subsumed under the Institute of Post School Studies of the University.

The University of Cape Town publishes a handbook titled *Continuing Professional Development Opportunities for Studying While Working*. A look at the 2013 edition of the book reveals the purpose and programmes of continuing education at the University, organised under the aegis of the Centre for Higher Education Development. Continuing education is 'for those who hope to improve their skills or qualifications while continuing to work' (UCT 2013, p.1). The handbook shows an extensive list of credit bearing courses, taken mostly from the University's conventional programmes, and non-credit bearing courses geared towards 'professional development, executive capacity building or general interests'. It is crucial to note that while admission requirements to the credit courses are often a replica of the requirements for conventional programmes, the non-credit bearing courses have no such requirements. In addition, even for the credit-bearing courses, a provision for recognizing prior learning through an outlined process is seen (UCT, 2013).

At the University of Nairobi's College of Education and External Studies, the School of Continuing and Distance Education, located within the runs a variety of distance education programmes, with learning centres scattered across the country. The 2014 Annual Report of the College of Education and External Studies, under which the Department of Extra-Mural Studies operates, shows a wide array of internal academic programmes as well as distance education programmes. A detailed listing of the programmes is available at www.distance-education.uonbi.ac.ke.

In West Africa, university continuing education development is worth noting in Ibadan. The University of Ibadan's Department of Adult Education, established in 1949, runs a gamut of programmes at the Diploma, Degree and Postgraduate levels. These cut across community development, adult education, community development, social welfare, industrial education, philosophy, history and economics of adult education, to mention a few. The book *40 Years of Adult Education at Ibadan in Nigeria, 1949-1989* (Akinpelu and Omolewa, 1989) captures a rich history of the department's intervention in both academic and outreach programmes. For outreach in particular, functional literacy, community development, workshops on collective bargaining and industrial relations represent some of the avenues for training various personnel at governmental and non-governmental levels, and also the private sectors of the Nigerian

economy. Distance education, run as the External Studies Programme, was started by the Department but is now housed at the Distance Learning Centre of the University.

At the Makerere University in Uganda, the College of Education and External Studies (CEES) carries out both internal academic programmes as well as outreach programmes to the community. A comprehensive proposal to operationalise the activities of the CEES has the following as the reason for its existence:

‘...to build professionalism in teaching and management of education at all levels and to increase access to quality adult, community, and distance education opportunities, research and services responsive to national and global needs’(Makerere University, November 2010, p.1)

The three schools involved in this are the School of Education, School of Distance and Lifelong Learning (SODLL) and the East African School of Higher Education Studies and Development. A further look shows a list of courses being offered at the undergraduate level, including the Bachelor of Science with Education and the Bachelor of Arts with Education at the School of Education. At SODDL, the programmes include Bachelors of Science, Commerce, Education (External), Agriculture and Rural Innovation and Adult and Community Education. They also include the Diploma in project Management and the Commonwealth Youth Programme Diploma in Youth in Development Work. In addition a host of postgraduate courses are offered (Makerere University, 2016)

In addition to teaching, research and service, many of the universities engaged in outreach are actively involved in distance education. For those who with dual mode systems, they utilize the resources, programmes and personnel of their universities to enhance access into tertiary educations. For some institutions that have set up dedicated institutions, such as the open universities in Africa, they solely promote distance education. They also utilize adult learning methodologies. The dedicated distance education institutions and their times of establishment in Africa include the Zimbabwe Open University (1999), UNISA (1873, 1946*), National Open University of Nigeria (2002), Open University of Tanzania (1992) and the Sudan Open University (2002). These single mode dedicated distance education institutions are able to expand access to tertiary education. UNISA, a mega university, enrolls a third of all tertiary level entrants in South Africa, reaches over 130 countries within and outside of Africa. As far back as 2013, UNISA had over 350,000 students (Wikipedia, 2016). It is notable that the open universities have added science courses to what they offer and a growth in enrolment has been observed over the years (Adekanmbi, 2015a).

Research, publishing and collaboration

The orientation of many adult and continuing education departments to research and publications, at the early stage was limited to case studies and experimental literacy

projects, with some level of UNESCO involvement. Books and publications utilized were mostly from outside the continent. Currently many journals have been published with a high level of university involvement on the continent. A list, highlighted in Adekanmbi (2011) includes:

- Journal of Adult Education-Tanzania
- Journal of Continuing Education and Extension- Tanzania
- Journal of Issues and Practice in Education- based at the Open University of Tanzania
- International Journal of Open and Distance Learning-SADC CDE
- Open Learning (Newsletter of SAIDE)
- Ghana Educational Management and Technology Association Journal (GEMTAJ)
- Adult Education in Nigeria-Journal of the NNCAE

The African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE Journal) is being resuscitated through the new association.

Still on publishing, many adult and continuing education departments have developed primers aimed at enhancing reading initiatives and promoting learning. This has been a major success for the University of Ibadan's Department of Adult Education as well as the now defunct Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Western Cape. The distance education departments have also developed and published distance education modules for their students. As in the case of the Open University of the United Kingdom, many conventional students find the distance education modules user-friendly, handy, encompassing, comprehensive, and detailed in their treatment of the subjects explored. The story with course development is true of the Open University of Tanzania, Ibadan's Centre for External Studies (now Distance Learning Centre), UNISA, the University of Namibia's Centre for External Studies, the University of Botswana's Distance Education Department and the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL). Many of the institutions have utilized the collaborative support of the Commonwealth Of Learning (COL) in developing course materials.

In attempting to honour protagonists of continuing education in Africa, and in so doing promoting access to university education, two major publications and a launched publication series are notable. *The State of Adult and Continuing Education in Africa* (Indabawa et al, 2000) dedicated to the late Emeritus Professor Jones Adelayo Akinpelu, and *Widening Access to Education and Social Justice: Essays in Honour of Michael Omolewa* (Oduaran and Bhola, 2006) are major. The African Perspective on Adult Learning published by the Pearson Education publishers in South Africa is aimed at putting 'the African context at the centre of adult education topics: foregrounds the importance of African philosophies, indigenous knowledge systems, traditions and cultures; accounts for the impact of neo-colonialism and globalisation' (UNESCO, 2010). Some of the titles within the series are *Foundations of Adult Education in Africa*, *The Psychology of Adult Learning in Africa*, *Developing programmes for Adult Learners in Africa*, *Research Methods in Adult Education in Africa*, and *The Social Context of Adult Learning in Africa*. All these books are aimed at promoting adult and

continuing education from an African perspective and are being utilised as resource materials to enhance the train-the-trainer initiative in continuing education in many universities.

In an earlier submission on some observable trends in publishing in adult and continuing education in sub-Saharan Africa, Adekanmbi (2011) had noted that dedicated series on adult and continuing education are non-existent on the sub-continent, unlike what exists in the USA and the United Kingdom where Routledge, Kogan page and Jossey-Bass publishing companies have dedicated series linked to an aspect of adult and continuing education. As part of exploring future possibilities, universities in the region can take up such roles, even in a collaborative manner, to pursue dedicated publishing ventures in the field.

Part of the international thrust of continuing education provision has come in the form of interactions of the universities with the International Council for Open and Distance Learning (ICDE), a non-Governmental organisation set up in 1938 to further distance learning initiatives as a non-governmental organization. Interactions with the Commonwealth Learning with exchange of staff and the organisation of fellowships have also been seen. Regional, national and continental associations such as the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA), the National Association of Distance Education Organisations in South Africa (NADEOSA) and the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) have promoted continuing education growth and development. Notably, the development of a Commonwealth Diploma Programme in Youth in Development Work was a culmination of collaborative initiatives between the Commonwealth Heads of Government and a number of universities in the Commonwealth. The work of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning has also been pivotal in promoting continuing education in sub-Saharan African universities.

The development of the Virtual University for Small states in the Commonwealth has utilized the skills and expertise of staff in universities in Africa, as has been the case with the African Virtual University. The growth of Open Educational Resources initiative and the related growth of the National Qualifications Frameworks have been made possible through the participation of continuing education personnel in sub-Saharan Africa.

Challenges, Mitigation and the Future

Challenges

Tettey (2006) in a report presented to the World Bank has identified a number of challenges facing many universities in sub-Saharan Africa. The report covers such institutions as the Universities of Ghana, Kwazulu Natal, Botswana, Ibadan and Makerere University. While the challenges reflect a general picture of the conventional universities, it is safe to assert that many continuing education units operating within these contexts share many of the problems. The challenges include

staff recruitment, attrition tied to poor service conditions, an ageing professoriate, and a recognition that many of the universities operate below capacities (Tettey, 2006). Also identified are cumbersome appointment procedures as well as stressful promotion procedures, workload problems and the problem of enrolling more students without a corresponding change in capacities and facilities (Tettey, 2006). In some cases, it was observed that staff were ready to trade off better pay for 'good health care coverage, car and housing loan schemes, support for children education and a reasonable pension' (p.3). Related to the above is the alarming emigration rate of African university intellectuals from their countries to greener pastures. Among the report's recommendations are improvements in appointments and promotion, institutional governance and workplace climate, teaching research and professional development, enhancing salaries and benefits and the role of governments, private sector and international partners. (Tettey, 2006).

Other challenges more specific to continuing education are a lack of understanding of the goals and needs of continuing education; media challenges, low budgetary provisions, and the absence of the required autonomy of practice. The uniqueness of some aspects of continuing education also poses its own challenge, as in for example, the need to purchase special equipment for distance education. A preponderant of the use of print related materials is noticeable in distance education, and so is the context in which distance education students do not have access to the Internet to access educational materials or to related Open Educational Resources (OERs).

Oduaran (2008) has discussed the challenges of relevance by university-based continuing education in sub-Saharan Africa, in the context of the twenty-first century. His main argument is that universities which run adult and continuing education programmes have not adequately prepared themselves for the knowledge economy. In underscoring this challenge, he further asks: (Oduaran, 2008:209):

...how might sub-Saharan university adult and continuing education intervene in helping our people gain entry into the knowledge-based economy?

These challenges require some form of definite intervention if university continuing education is to progress within the sub-continent.

Mitigation

In mitigating the challenges, managers of universities in Africa can utilize partnerships and support from various continental and international organisations in pursuing their goals. In more ways than one, such bodies as the Commonwealth of Learning and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning exist to further the goals of continuing education. University continuing education would need to utilize such partnerships to their advantage. However, there is need to strengthen existing systems of continuing education through enhanced levels of autonomy and provision of adequate budgetary requirements. Also, there is need for the

organisation of continuing education awareness programmes within universities, interaction with employers of labour to enhance access of staff to digital technologies, and the implementation of digital policies established by governments on the one hand, and by the universities on the other. There is also the need to develop platforms to promote the recognition of prior learning, and the development of libraries and resource centres in rural communities. Organisation of public and inaugural lectures that address the themes of continuing education is also necessary. Continuing education units will also need to repackaging university disciplinary content for community use.

Oduaran (2008) has submitted among others that universities in the region would need to be proactive in providing leadership in the pursuit of the knowledge-based economy. Also, they would need to collaborate with others to eradicate illiteracy in Africa while channeling their expertise towards ‘championing relevant research, application and training of the workforce needed for managing the different literacy programmes’ (p. 209) In addition, he suggests that in raising workforce skills, enhancing needed competencies and exploring commercial opportunities:

...university adult and continuing education would be required to contribute more effectively to raising the human capital levels of our population, especially the workforces’ (p. 211).

The future

David Wetzel (May 2010), in an article titled ‘What are the future trends in continuing education?’ had identified four such trends. These are increased mobile learning; use of learning networks and reliance on social networks; growth of ‘Do-it-yourself learning; and the growth of e-learning. In Wetzel’s views, many learners in continuing education are generally ‘concerned about future trends in education’ as these relate to how continuing education will utilize technology, and to what extent many are ready for it. The major fear expressed is the degree to which learners and facilitators are prepared. With mobile devices growth, the learning possibilities with such devices are being tested. Universities in sub-Saharan Africa need to explore these as they consider their future.

Still on the future, Fordham (2000) has submitted that adult and continuing education in Africa requires a re-definition. The writer notes that such a re-definition would revolve around training where, firstly, any training being carried out must of necessity have a determined purpose and link with the social, economic and political development. Secondly, clarity about expected clientele and the benefitting agencies is vital. Thirdly, in the context of quickly changing landscape, the utilization of training personnel in fieldwork supervision and research is also key (Fordham, 2000).

Conclusion

The entry of continuing education into the agenda of universities in sub-Saharan African countries has a rationale that is rooted in attempts by the universities to dump their ivory tower stance and reflect a genuine desire to be relevant to the communities they serve. Such attempts to be relevant have meant that the universities have had to, in playing their social roles, organized programmes, through various flexible approaches, media and methodologies that address community needs and concerns. The models of operations used and the pattern of intervention have made the access question a top priority, in a context where the average gross enrolment ratio at the tertiary level is barely 8%, a far cry from the world average, and in a context where the youth population continues to swell and face enormous challenges. Fast tracking access in provisions may require a paradigm shift in intervention, if Africa is to fully achieve its developmental agenda and meet the new targets set by the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the SDGs, apart from Goal number 4 which is to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all', another goal is number 5, which is to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' (Wikipedia, 2016b). Continuing education at the university level must address these goals.

A starting point in making the necessary shift in intervention would require all stakeholders in university operations to recognize that first, continuing education departments and units cannot be treated as mere educational appendages within university structures. Policies and budgetary provisions that enhance operational effectiveness need to be put in place while the recruitment of appropriate personnel for continuing education programmes is necessary. The uniqueness of programme types, as in the case of distance education, must be properly recognized, and a desired increase in higher enrolment ratio should be a priority. Universities in sub-Saharan Africa that fail to give due recognition to continuing education and all it can offer do so at their own peril.

University continuing education must seek to address gaps in the supply of physicians, nurses and related health workers, earlier noted in the ILO (2015) publication. While they must also address similar gaps regarding teacher supply in the right quantity and quality, the expectations and opportunities for universities are quite enormous, and continuing education must of necessity play a role in addressing such gaps. It would be expected that provisions by government, industry and non-governmental organisations must increase significantly to allow for an appropriate continuing education intervention. Also, universities and other tertiary education institutions must brace themselves up to mitigate the wide range of developmental

deficiencies. A continuing pursuit of the gains and possibilities of continuing education is vital, necessary and is urgently required.

Finally, the growth in the use of technology worldwide needs to be replicated in continuing education practice on the sub continent. The development of digital policies by many sub-Saharan African countries has been seen as a good platform for widening interest and participation in digital technology use in Africa. However governments need to further address broadband issues and the creation of public space in rural areas for internet connectivity, accessibility and ultimate use by continuing education students. Also, increasing government visibility through the web enhances development and complements the efforts of university continuing education departments and centres in making pedagogical information available to a wide variety of clientele.

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