

# Learning transformations in University Continuing Education and the African response

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## Introduction

University continuing education in Africa has undergone profound learning transformations palpably induced by changing political controls, broad policy modifications, economic structural adjustments and teaching-learning methodologies embedded in increasing applications of andragogy and ICT. To a great extent, these learning transformations have led to some expansion in the diversity of adult learners one can expect to find in programmes aimed at widening participation in different countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The learning transformations are here discussed very briefly in three major contexts, namely: colonial, post-independence, and contemporary times. The learning transformations are explored from the perspectives of individual “learner” populations, social change and the competing challenges with which Africa is contending. To achieve our goal, the paper articulates the different major initiatives African universities have put in place in response to the changing needs and challenges facing our people. It is to be noted that from the colonial through post-independence to the contemporary times, university continuing education has been planned and implemented in such a way that it reflects changing learners and meeting their learning needs. Consequently, outreach programmes have been restructured in response to the challenges. Emphasis is laid broadly on how the adoption of the strategy of lifelong learning in Africa is impacting on the programming of university continuing education to respond to changing learners and communities. In particular, we seek to examine how ICT, andragogy and diversity have impacted on changing learners and changing communities in Africa within each of the stipulated contexts. Before proceeding in the direction specified, it might be useful to contextualise the discussion.

## Africa in Context

Covering an area of about 30 million km<sup>2</sup>, Africa is the third largest continent in the world. It has 53 independent states, 46 of which are situated on the continent itself, six are islands and archipelagos constituting states and (Equatorial Guinea) includes a continental territory and islands (Les editions J.A. 2002:24-55). As at 2001, Africa was populated by 820 million people and with a year 2000 estimation of Gross National Revenue per inhabitant standing at 671 US Dollars on the average. That figure is perhaps 47 times lower than that of the United States (\$34,100) and almost 8 times lower than the global average (\$5,170). As at 2000, Africa accounted for 11% of global trade in ores and minerals, 1% of world industrial output and just 1.8% of world trade (Les editions J.A. 2002:26). What this means is that the economy is still largely agrarian and relies on foreign loans with commensurate high interest rates. What that means is that after Africa’s pleas for rescheduling of foreign debts, the

continent has been compelled to adopt the Northern countries dictated stabilization policies and structural adjustment programmes that have visited untold hardships on Africans.

Africa has remained engrossed in conflicts, poverty, pandemic diseases, environmental degradation and adult illiteracy and political instabilities of immense dimensions (Oduaran, 2003:11-25). These problems remain high on the agenda of the development of Africa that has been colonised by the Arabs, Portuguese, British, Italians, French and Spanish at different times and in different locations. Africa remains a unique continent that is diverse in humankind, natural resources, ethnicity, culture, language and religion to which African University continuing education has been urged to respond. Our emphasis is on Sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Sunset at sunrise: colonial legacies**

Sub-Saharan universities had hardly taken any firm root when the elites and illiterate Africans began criticising them for being conceived in colonial legacies. Their philosophies, objectives and characteristics were deemed to be incapable of preparing the people for effective competition in modern development. They were criticised for cultivating “new” closed communities of scholars who allow into their exclusive and cultural midst only those who possess the intellectual capacity and capability to be admitted into them (Yesufu, 1973:73; Ajayi and others, 1996:1 and Oduaran and Moremong, 2002:3). The culprits here were the University Colleges that had been established in Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda.

People tended to forget or remained unappreciative of the fact that the universities had met the needs of the colonial enterprise for which it produced personnel who served in different capacities. They forgot that in spite of all the inadequacies, the universities had also virtually cultivated a new class of Africans who saw themselves as the champions of the movement for independent Africa, the first results of this coming in 1957 when Ghana became independent just as Ethiopia had stemmed back the Italian occupation in much earlier times.

Colonial Sub-Saharan Africa did not experience any ICT revolution. It, however, experienced the importation of andragogy that was applied to different categories of learners. For the Departments of Extra Mural Studies that were established at Ibadan, Achimota, Nairobi and Kampala had begun to meet right from the beginning the needs of illiterate adults and learners who wanted to continue learning in order to remedy their inadequate performances in overseas qualifying examinations. In fact, these pursuits were carried over to the postcolonial era.

### **Masters/mistresses of our destiny**

Beginning from the 1960s most Sub-Saharan countries became independent. With independence, Africans had their destinies in their own hands. Colonial policies were revisited just as the political leaders sought to move the people in the “right” direction so that they could fulfil their dreams. The universities were no more expected to be 'carbon copies' of the European universities to which they were affiliated.

Between 1960 and 1970 post-colonial Africa was characterised by a copious search for the fastest means of personnel development in the context of high optimism and hope that what the people needed was rewarding socio-economic transformation. University continuing education was expected then to be relevant in terms of contributing more positively to the process of providing competences to Africans whose skills were obsolete in the light of new challenges.

The new challenges to which university continuing education was expected to respond included among others, how best the newly independent states could be assisted to

consolidate their political sovereignty and initiate economic development paradigms and programmes that are capable of diversifying the factors of production whilst moving away from monocultural economies. The universities were required to embrace the challenges of widening access with an eye on quality, relevance, equality, equity and social justice.

Post-colonial universities were urged to confront head-on the issue of curricula review. The curricula pursued at the Yaba Higher College, Achimota College Fourah Bay and then the University College of Ibadan, the Khartoum University College (Sudan), the Makerere University College, The Royal Technical College, Nairobi, as well as the College of Arts, Social Studies and Law, Dar-es-Salaam were deemed as rather too archaic to meet adequately the new challenges. People were disenchanted with the tendency to uphold penchant with Latin, classics, religious studies, philosophies and arts. The clamour then was for agricultural science, veterinary science, forestry, science, technology, architecture, commerce and medicine. The problems of inadequate access and pre-entry qualifications also meant that university continuing education had to fill the gaps of providing for the not-so-hopeful to hopeful Africans in terms of equipping them for entry into universities.

The French speaking African countries were not left out in the transformations. For in addition to the Befelatanana School of Medicine that had been established in 1896, the University of Tananarive, the Aix-Marseille Faculty of Law and the Institutes of Higher Studies, Dakar and Tananarive had been pressured into Africanising their curricular in order to be relevant and decolonised (Ade-Ajayi and others, 1996:59).

Similarly, the Lovanium University Centre, Kinshasa (established in 1954), the Free University Campus, Kisangani and the State University of Lubumbashi (Elizabethville), all of which were mainly Belgian initiatives, were equally required to respond to the new challenges of relevance and modernisation. That was the same expectation required to the Pius XII College of Lesotho, Roma, the Liberia University, Haile Selassie 1 University (Ethiopia) and the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. They were not only asked to provide relevant curricular but broaden access to higher education, reach out to sixth form studies and counter racism. The battle against racism in university education had become very strong just as the Fort Hare College was pursuing an agenda that favoured apartheid.

Countering apartheid in higher education in South Africa had a bridgehead in 1916 when the University Acts enacted by the Union Government paved way for the inauguration of the University of South Africa and the Universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch. Here, it was the pursuit of the goals of redressing imbalance in university continuing education, this time in favour of black Africans.

The University of South Africa (UNISA) provides a good case study of what post-colonial universities were expected to do in response to the demands for rapid transformations. Access had been limited not just by financial means but also by accommodation. It was in this situation that the University of South Africa (UNISA) undertook the initiation of external degree studies in 1945. Unfortunately, so to say, the greater proportion of university age students availing themselves of the opportunity offered by the correspondence format were whites. For example, out of about 5,000 students in Cape Town in 1959, 461 of them were multi-racial, 133 Asian and just 39 of them were Africans (Ade-Ajayi and others, 1996:71).

The demand for relevance and widening access was followed by that of the need to break down ivory towerism. The universities were required to adapt themselves to the people's circumstances, meet needs and reflect the hopes of those for whom they were established in the first place. So, responsive and social adult education and extension classes in agriculture, public administration, African studies and education were vital in terms of meeting new goals that had been unmet under colonial provisions.

### **Changing learners and communities in contemporary times**

The demands for modernisation, relevance and competitiveness in contemporary time had been based on the criticisms of the colonial legacies of university continuing education. The problems of contemporary times demanded extra-ordinary ingenuity in articulated response. Therefore, the National Universities in East Africa, Southern and Central Africa, West Africa, the National University of Zaire, the University of Madagascar, the National University of Khartoum as well as the National Systems of Higher Education in Francophone Africa had been separately and collectively requested to respond through their continuing education programmes to a number of problems.

We cannot within the limits allowed articulate all of the problems. Suffice it to say that university continuing education needed to respond articulately to the problems of widening access in the light of the demand for competence and competitiveness in globalising economies. University continuing education was expected to continue to help newly independent states whose economies were opened to development following the discovery of abundant natural resources for the purposes of exploring and effectively managing the new wealth. For some other African countries that had been engrossed in political crisis of immense magnitude resulting in civil wars, for example, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and those smarting from many years of military dictatorships, the demand has been for ways of how to apply university continuing education in response to reduced financial provision by governments, ambivalence in curricula orientations and then the harmful prevalence of stagnation and, more profoundly, deterioration of physical and human resources as Africa struggles with huge external debts and debt-servicing outlays.

Apart from challenges driven from the outside, university continuing education has been requested to review its internal efficiency in terms of retaining and re-skilling its managers.

Again as we face challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, more attention is focused on the effectiveness of the African university in discharging its many responsibilities to meet the ever-changing faces of the contemporary communities. Accordingly, a critical question is, ‘How can the African University exert maximum influence over the pace and direction of the transformational process?’ (Adedeji, 1998). Such transformation process is a prevalent feature of the university and local communities. Universities in Africa today are required to address these transformations, both within universities and out in the communities. Rightly so, because in its public self-presentation, the university hopes to accommodate new demands and new efficiencies. It reflects a picture of a changing, expanding and varying phenomenon especially on what it does, how it teaches, conducts research and reaches out to the communities. When for example, the UNESCO conference on the Development of Higher Education in Africa (1962) critically examined the role of African universities in the transformation of their societies, it suggested that “in addition to its traditional function and obligations to teach and to advance knowledge through research, the role of higher education in the social, cultural and economic development of Africa must, among other things be (i) “to encourage elucidation of and appreciation for African culture and heritage and to dispel misconceptions of Africa, through manpower and teaching of African Studies and, to (ii) evolve over the years a truly African pattern of higher learning dedicated to Africa and its people, yet promoting a bond of kinship to the larger human society” (Ayotebi and Gboyega, 2002). The aforementioned objectives reflect the fact that “most African universities were established in a period of high optimism and confident hope that they would be major instruments for the socio-economic transformations of their countries” (Ayotebi and Gboyega, 2002).

As reflected in the preceding discussion, African universities, on a spectrum from the state-run, parastatal to highly autonomous or independent universities have major roles to play in responding to and advancing transformations. They are expected to pursue local, universal

and global goals for reasons that are explored later in this paper. These reasons include the following:

- ✓ To respond to the peculiar demands and needs of their societies and, indeed of Africa. No university can successfully fulfil its role unless there is complete linkage of its activities with the needs of the local communities.
- ✓ To meet global academic standard and inculcate universal academic values – the global attention is increasingly focused on exploring and exploiting the new and emerging technologies to better serve the diverse needs of learners.
- ✓ To foster relevant responses to the challenges of globalisation through well informed and thought of teaching and learning systems.

To a certain extent, the African university continues to pursue some of these objectives successfully. To date, the African university is helping to create learning societies and empowering African communities to cope with modern challenges. The African university has undertaken new steps in their teaching-learning endeavours that reflect changing learners and changing communities. Some major initiatives include the following:

- ✓ Curriculum diversity – Diversity is about expanding horizons of learning and doing. One only needs to look at African universities curriculum of one hundred years ago, or that of the colonial era and compare it with the contemporary one to see that indeed they have expanded their horizons. Inclusive in the curriculum these days are programs that explore indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, African philosophy and multicultural education.
- ✓ Responsive forms of education (teaching and learning) – various forms, such as distance education, non-formal education, lifelong learning, education for self-help and education for liberation are now explored by African universities. Distance education, for example has become an integral part of the national education system of many countries. Non-formal education is on a large scale in many African countries. Also it is reasonable to assume that, indeed if technology is a major tool to advance some learning discourses, then, the advent and establishment of ICT in some African countries promises more avenues of responding to the transformations.
- ✓ Adoption of the strategy of lifelong learning in Africa
- ✓ World class programmes of learning, basic and applied research – Globalisation as well as technological advancements make it possible for the African university to share information and learn from people outside Africa. Such sharing constitutes an effective way of tapping information that might help in meeting the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- ✓ Furthermore, to enhance the constant dynamic role the African university is playing, several conferences have been organised. For example, there was the 1962 UNESCO Conference on the Development of Higher Education in Africa and others organised in 2001 by the Economic Commission for Africa and in 1997 by the Association of African Universities Conferences. Such conferences have been useful in helping the universities to respond to new pressures and technological changes.

### **ICT, Andragogy and Diversity**

Even though McMullin (2000:1) has warned that ICT must be seen as ‘quick-fix for Africa’, university continuing education has transformed itself via the ICT. Most centres for

continuing education have already bought into the idea of using the Internet as a technique for broadening access. Unfortunately, in Sub-Saharan Africa, only one in every 160 (approximately 5 million people) in a population of 820 million has access to the Internet. That means that there is a serious constraint in depending solely on the electronic media. In almost all the universities offering adult education as an area of professional growth, andragogy is taught as a mainstream course. Similarly, in almost all the programmes that are offered, andragogy is applied as the major principle guiding interactions. The issue of diversity of programmes is tangential because the academic menu is quite rich and responsive to the immediate needs of the people. There are concerns, for example, that programmes should cover vocational and non-vocational contents.

### **The future of university continuing education**

Given the challenges that prevail now, one can say that the transformations university continuing education would be expected to undertake are quite challenging. It is expected that new technologies should help Africa in reaching out to those still stranded outside the Ivory Towers but who are crying for academic, social, economic and political salvation. This would remain the case as we battle the vagaries of poverty, destitution, HIV/AIDS, civil wars and political instability among other tensions.

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