Understanding Adult and Continuing Education in the Digital Age Helps Generate Innovative Ways in Contributing to Knowledge Economies in South Africa

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Abstract: **As digital age features opportunities and complex challenges in adult and continuing education, as it probably does in other disciplines, there is a need for practitioners to understand the discipline for generating innovative ways to help the discipline survive the change pressure in South Africa, and probably the world over; and this is the focus of this conceptual paper.**

Keywords: **Innovative ways, adult education, adult and continuing education, knowledge economies.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Adult and continuing education has been viewed as a lifelong education for every adult (Jarvis, 2003: 23). In this context, there is an implication that this lifelong discipline will always be relevant to the needs of the society regardless of the changing times. According to Holmes (2003: 9), lifelong learning is the kind of learning that occurs throughout a person's life. This indicates that as times change, it is important for those practicing adult and continuing education to get involved into activities that will help in the transformation of the discipline so that both the practitioners and the discipline may remain relevant. It is in this context that Selwyn, Gorard, and Furlong (2005) argue that the use of Information and Communication Technologies will help adult learners to help in changing the world for the better. Merriam and Bierema (2014: 6) say that technology is also changing how adults learn, and that adult basic education programs through continuing professional education are incorporating technology in both the design of curriculum and its delivery.

When andragogy, as an adult education teaching method, was published in the United States of America by Knowles in 1950, though coined in Germany in 1833, many scholars realized that adult and continuing education makes a foundation of the learning of adults in the society, and that the discipline's relevance was as living as people were on earth (Houle, 1996: 26-27). This should be understood to mean that the discipline of adult and continuing education has relevance in many organizations in the society, and that as long as people get engaged in teaching others how to do things in the society, adult and continuing education and its practitioners will have to remain relevant and continue to learn new things in a formal and informal way as heralded by Hoult (2006: 119). This connotes the notion that adult and continuing education will remain relevant in the global knowledge economies.

According to Bullen (2008: 130), digital age poses some challenges to adult and continuing adult educators in that there is a great divide between those that use information and communication technologies (ICTs) for informal learning and those using the ICT for formal learning; and that research has discovered that those who use ICT for informal learning are far more than those using it for formal learning. Understanding adult and continuing education, amidst challenges and opportunities in the digital age, will help the discipline practitioners generate innovative ways in contributing to knowledge economies.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The inception of digital age has challenged the relevance of adult and continuing education practitioners. According to MacGrecor (2008), there is a challenge that traditional contact universities seem to be relaxed in connecting to the need of adults to be educated so as to acquire relevant skills for absorption in the job market, and this has been said as follows:

Public contact universities have generally not been successful in attracting mature students onto mainstream degree programmes, aside from ubiquitous MBAs, and so the post-apartheid ideal of opening access to public higher education for growing numbers of mature and non-traditional students has mostly not translated into reality.

As if the none-accessibility of communities by the universities is not problematic enough, there seems another challenge that some universities, like South Africa's North West University Mafikeng Campus (authors' observation), which removed adult education from the calendar of the education faculty in 2010 (North-West University, 2010) because they perceived it as none-sustainable reflected by dwindling student-intake numbers. The challenge here is that the need to educate adults is still outstandingly increasing, but the production of practitioners is somewhat dwindling, thus the search for innovative ways for discipline survival in this digital age.

The idea of removing programs from the university calendar, and that of some universities not participating in the promotion of adult and continuing education, while the South African government is busy finding ways to advance the same discipline is somewhat conflicting. It may be possibly that adult and continuing education discipline is not well understood, hence the need to have some positive reflections on what the discipline is and how beneficial it is to development processes.

The author believes that the South Africa Government's trying to involve universities in adult and continuing education reveals that adult and continuing education discipline has value in this global changing knowledge economies in the digital age (South Africa Year Book, 2015).

3. STUDY OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this paper is to advance the idea that understanding adult and continuing education will help practitioners look for innovative ways to become relevant in the discipline in the digital age. This objective may be subdivided as in the following objectives:

- To display to the practitioners the diversities of adult and continuing education, as a proper subset of adult education, in the digital age.

- To promote a notion that while the digital age advances with a lot of complexities, there are opportunities and challenges that can help practitioners to become even more relevant than ever before.

4. STUDY SIGNIFICANCE

This study is expected to assist academics and other professionals in adult and continuing education who may require to develop knowledge, attitude, and skills for relevance in adult and continuing education in the digital age.

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Jarvis (2003) advances a concept that as the world is changing, new things come up, and therefore, there is a need for every human being to grow and develop in learning so as to continue surviving in this technological changing world.

Due to the changing world that demands human beings to be in a constant motion of education and learning, it is therefore advocated in this paper that education for adults, as part of their learning to deal with necessary changes, is critical to uphold the concept that adult and continuing education will always be needed to meet the technological development of the world. There are quite a good number of things, in this technological age, which are invented on daily basis (Johnson, 2011), hence a need for adult and continuing education practitioners to look out for the opportunities to remain relevant to other societal structures.

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to authenticate the paper quality literature review is based on government gazette, seculars, books, and journals which have been assessed to inform the content, and thus integrated in the document content.

7. METHODOLOGY

To collect data for this study, the researcher used verbal-feedback symposium approach, interview schedules, questionnaires, reviewing of government documents, and general observations. To collect data for this paper, the researcher used qualitative approaches for data presentation and interpretation (Bricki & Green, 2016).

Verbal-feedback symposium approach:

Part of this paper formed the keynote address that was presented in an international conference on the "transforming adult and continuing education practices on the 29th April 2016 in Pretoria, and there was a discussion which served as feedback which informed this study.

Interview schedules:

The South African North West Provincial chair for monitoring and evaluation in community education and training was interviewed to reflect on the continuous relevance of adult and continuing education practitioners in adult and continuing education and ways to keep that relevance relevant in the digital age. The South African Eastern Cape former leader in Kharigude mass literacy program was also telephonically contacted on both the relevance in adult and continuing education and finding ways to innovate so as to promote the proper integration of adult education in the digital age. One principal of the school situated close to the North West University (Mafikeng Campus) was also consulted in the sense that her program was classified as an adult and continuing education due to the fact that the students were young adults who got to the school for upgrading matriculation results.

Questionnaires:

Sixty-five (65) education and training faculty students, with age range between 20 and 45 were given questionnaires which were collected in two sessions of two separate classes, and then had the questionnaires combined for analysis. The questionnaires were looking for data on the relevance in adult and continuing education in the digital age, they covered the perceptions of respondents on the discipline the respondents had on adult and continuing education as a discipline.

Reviewing of government documents:

The South African government seculars, and other related documents, were considered for data collection, especially in finding out the conceptual framework on adult and continuing education, and how universities are involved in advancing the Government agenda (South Africa, 2015).

Observations:

The author had to bring in some observations from life experiences on the metamorphosis of adult education in South Africa, and how the service providers deal with adult and continuing education, in the digital age.

8. DISCUSSIONS

Verbal-feedback symposium approach:

During the international conference proceedings, it was discovered that unless adult and continuing education practitioners engage in innovative practices in the digital age, the discipline may lose its relevance to the communities. However, the conclusion on this item ended up with a notion that as long as digital age evolves with time, there will always be opportunities as well as challenges for the discipline practitioners.

During the discussions, which served as a feedback on the relevance in adult and continuing education, there were issues that were raised that indicated that some communities, especially in Africa, should learn to find new ways of dealing with some pieces of "new knowledge" that was coming outside Africa which Africans termed as "undesirable" and unwholesome in nature that would affect the children. This item ended with an idea that there is need for adults to engage in "knowledge immunization" as knowledge from outside Africa reaches both adults and children without filtering, thus a need to give fore-knowledge to each population group so that as information gets to the consumers in the digital age, consumers should have developed immunity to deal with the knowledge that is termed as "undesirable" and unwholesome in nature.

In general, the discussions revolved around the following:

8.1. Digital age opportunities for adult and continuing education practitioners:

Regardless of changes in the knowledge economies, adult and continuing education has been presented with opportunities for development in the digital age. The following opportunities are some of the discovered ones:

a. Institutional online learning programs for adults.

b. Wide range of digitalized jobs for adults.

c. Post retirement learning opportunity.

d. Abroad school systems with blended learning.

e. General use of information and communication technology tools for the knowledge economy.

8.2. Digital age challenges for adult and continuing education practitioners:

Bullen (2008:130) highlights a challenge of the gap that needs to be reduced between those using ICT in developed world and those in developing world due to socio-economic barriers that present the difference in terms of accessibility to the ICT.   These challenges have an impact on how to quickly transform adult and continuing education in the digital age.

It is quite critical at this stage to note that there are a number of challenges that adult and continuing education is facing as it stands to remain relevant in the digital age; some of the challenges have been listed as:

a. Lack of coherent technology assisted background.

b. Weak economy that denies adults to access the digital tools.

c. Fear of learning that which could have been acquired years before the digitalized needs.

d. Compromised ego to venture into digitalized projects.

e. General stigma.

8.3. Transforming adult and continuing education practices for development in the digital age:

As the world gets transformed, so should the discipline of adult and continuing education so as to remain relevant, because learning is central to human development (Foley, 2008:4). For this reason, transforming adult and continuing education, while bearing in mind the issue of remaining relevant to the communities, may require the practitioners to focus on the following:

- Adult and continuing education discipline content.

- Adult and continuing education dimensions.

- Adult and continuing education and organizational culture.

- Adult and continuing education and people development.

- Adult and continuing education practices.

- Adult and continuing education and life changes.

- Adult and continuing education methods of discipline content delivery.

a. Adult and continuing education discipline content:

 As transformation is considered in adult and continuing education in this digital age, practitioners should consider the discipline content to cover adult education, adult basic education, adult basic education, and philosophy of adult education.

- **Adult education:** For the adult and continuing education practitioners to be relevant to the discipline in this digital age, they need to understand what adult education embraces. Due to the way adult and continuing education was introduced to many parts of the world; many people have mistaken adult education for a literacy program. To remain relevant to the adult and continuing education consumers, adult and continuing education practitioners need to view adult education as education for adults, and that it does not stop at a certain age, but it continues, as Jarvis (1990) asserts. For

the transformation to take place, adult and continuing education practitioners should consider adult education as a discipline that requires continuous revisiting for progress of learners and discipline consumers (Foley, 2008: 3-4). This implies that the content will have to be revisited continuously as much as other aspects like service providers, teaching methods, and the environment (Materna, 2007:12) in which teaching and learning take place.

- **Adult basic education:** According to Jobson (2012), adult basic education has been affected by new technologies, and practitioners need to find ways to teach and learn in this digital age. In this context, it should be understood that what was basic yesterday, may not necessarily be basic today. This implies that if reading literacy was a challenge yesterday, reading literacy from the computer may be the challenge today. So, adult basic education will change meaning as digital age adjusts itself.

- **Adult literacy education (language and numeracy):** Brooks-Young (2007) comments as follows:

Technology integration requires systemic reform, which must be supported by the entire school community. Most teachers and administrators need help to implement and sustain change on this scale. Regardless of their current level of technology proficiency, Digital-Age Literacy for Teachers will help teachers systematically reexamine their curriculum and classroom management to develop effective strategies for incorporating technology.

- **Philosophy of adult education:** Basically, there are principles that underpin the discipline of adult and continuing education. These relate to content, methods of teaching and learning, and understanding what adult and continuing education really is. Brooks-Young (2007:12) indicates that adult and continuing education teachers have to keep on learning how to integrate technology in their teaching methods, as a matter of principle.

b. Adult and continuing education dimensions:

Transforming adult and continuing education practices requires the discipline relevance relating to formal, non-formal, informal, and incidental kind of learning in the digital age knowledge economies. These dimensions of adult and continuing education are believed to be pivotal in the transformation of the discipline.

- **Formal education and learning:** For the transformation to take place, adult and continuing education practitioners have to carry out research that considers the formal education of adults and how they learn.

Kidd and Keengwe (2010) argue that formal education would receive a lot of help when using digital age tools like the blog, and they say it this way:

With these principles in mind, students in small groups were encouraged to set up and maintain a blog as a portfolio of their work. In the paper, we discuss the role of blogs in providing a social mechanism for the student body and also as an outlet for classroom and practical examples. We show that students have utilized the blogs creatively and interwoven their blogs with their personal stories. These have proved to be an extremely useful and an effective tool for the adult learners …. We also consider the limitations of blogs and argue that a supported and pedagogical approach to blogging environments is needed for them to be effective. The paper concludes by proposing the development of a Personal Development Planning process that we argue will enable further development and empowerment of adult learners.

- **Non-formal education and learning**: Among the dimensions of adult and continuing education that need transformation is a non-formal sector. According to Foley (2008: 4), non-formal education is one that occurs when people see a need for some sort of systematic instruction such as operating a new machine. The digital age has come with challenges in this are too, and practitioners have to find ways of how to address challenges posed by the inclusiveness of technologies in some training sessions so that learning may be accompanied by productivity.

- **Informal education and learning:** The use of face book and blogs have come to impact the informal adult education with challenges that, sometimes, have threatened peace in families, workplaces, and other areas of life. However, these technologies have also come up with advantages for communication and learning purposes as people share ideas on WhatsApp walls. Adult and continuing education practitioners have to find ways of how to make these informal learning sessions be fruitful to the communities around them.

- **Incidental education and learning:** According to Foley (2008: 4-5), incidental kind of learning is that type which a professional acquires while on duty performing a task. Relating to this incidental learning is a view that when thinking about transforming adult and continuing education, transforming practitioners have to consider the views of those who have been in the profession for some time because some of their experience may not be written elsewhere except in their

minds. To transform adult and continuing education requires acquiring knowledge about challenges and smooth-sailings professionals facing while practicing on duty. Commenting on the effect of this incidental learning in adult and continuing education, Gravett (2008: 14) argues that incidental learning can make learners resist the absorption on knew knowledge as long as it is perceived to conflict the previous knowledge. In this context, it is advisable for adult and continuing education transforming practitioners, as they intend to educate, to consider the prior-knowledge of adult learners so that learning can be progressive. To remain relevant, in this digital age, adult and continuing education practitioners will need to engage into research so as to find out what is actually happening in the adult and continuing education industry. Without this, practitioners may find adult learners resisting adopting new knowledge because they are comfortable with the old ways that may, at times, more time consuming than ever. Researching into what is happening in the discipline may help the discipline to be transformed with very little resistance.

c.   Adult and continuing education and organizational culture:

- **Lifelong learning**: According to Merriam, Bierema (2014:7), technology cannot be separated from globalization and the knowledge society, and that there is still much to address the basic needs of the marginalized people and nations before all can benefit from participation in this digitalized, globalized, and knowledge society. To remain relevant in adult and continuing education, practitioners should develop an organizational culture of using technology to deal with the challenges that face our globe. In this way, adult and continuing education can be considered as lifelong learning.

- **Continuing, recurrent and initial education and learning**: There is information which needs to be kept as part of organizational culture of learning which has the chance of recurring, and the use of ICT is quite a handy idea to keep information for adult and continuing education in this digital age.

- **Organizational learning:** Researcher's personal observation has it that most of the universities in South Africa use e-mail communication system for organizational intra-communication purposes. Sometimes academics may conduct meetings through digital methods while members of staff are in different geographical locations. This kind of communication, in the digital age, can help adult and continuing education to be transformed if correctly used, and adult and continuing education practitioners may remain relevant if they use some of these technologies for classroom discussions to promote learning.

- **Gender in adult education:** It is common today to find both men and women involved in e-learning using digital methods. To remain relevant in adult and continuing education, discipline practitioners need to be gender sensitive in this digital age for transformation to take place in some of the global communities where gender is still a deciding factor of who should attend which school.

d.   Adult and continuing education and people development:

- **Staff development:** As the digital age advances the daily challenges, it is a critical thing for those engaged in adult and continuing education to move with the moving times. To advance this notion, Brooks-Young (2007:12) advocates that there is need to have staff development as technology advances into the future. To remain relevant in adult and continuing education, teaching staff need to be developed as technology develops so that their teaching may be made easy.

- **Technical vocational education and training:** Those from the technical vocational education and training need to as well see their relevance to whole picture of economy and development in this digital age. Especially when it comes to communicating projects that must be done away from the sending centres through technological devices.

- **Employability and economic development**: As people graduate from Institutions for higher learning, as graduates of adult and continuing education, they should be having the ability to be employed like others from other disciplines. This will help them not only to economically benefit from the systems, but they will also contribute to development in a remarkable way.

e.   Adult and continuing education practices:

- **Institutional structure for lifelong learning:** As Institutions communicate within themselves; it has generally been observed that they use digital methods for both intra-communication and inter-organizational communications. These kinds of practices should be promoted for effectiveness and efficiency of organizations. As long as institutions will need to communicate, there will always be a need to have lifelong learning, thus adult and continuing education remains relevant in the digital age.

- **Community based adult education**: In most universities in South Africa, an observation by the author of this paper has it that most of the lecture theatres have facilities that are classified as digitally-influenced by modern technologies. This has been observed in community based adult education projects that require the use of technologies. People have gone to the extent of having group discussions on the WhatsApp wall for education purposes too.

f. Adult and continuing education and life changes:

As it may be observed in the writing below, adult and continuing education can bring some life changes, thus transforming the discipline will bring a lot of relief to human sufferings in this digital age.

- **Adult education for social change**: According to Webmaster (2016), adult education has a lot of benefits in the world in this digital age. The following have been outlined:

▪ Make our economy grow and develop

▪ Ensure that their children develop a love of learning and take full advantage of education

▪ Actively participate in their own communities and civil society

▪ Support and respect people with different cultural beliefs and abilities

▪ Respect and protect the environment for future generations

▪ Nurture creativity and imagination

▪ Live healthy and fulfilled lives

▪ So: Investing in adult education makes sense for individuals, families, communities and our country as a whole.

Brown (2016) indorses an idea that learning has an impact on social change, and the saying goes as: "**L**earning is a remarkably social process. In truth, it occurs *not* as a response to teaching, but rather as a result of a social framework that fosters learning. To succeed in our struggle to build technology and new media to support learning, we must move far beyond the traditional view of teaching as delivery of information." This reflects the idea that transforming an educational system is quite a challenge in this digital age, thus costs are unavoidable.

- **Adult education and technology**: The use of technology in adult education can help in the promotion of widening of educational participation, support of diversity of educational provision, and better forms and outcomes of adult learning (Selwyn, Gorard, and Furlong, 2006). This connotes that in order for adult and continuing education to transform the discipline, practitioners, thereof, need to promote the use of technological tools; in this way the discipline, together with its practitioners, will remain relevant to the global village.

g. Adult and continuing education methods of discipline content delivery:

In the digital age, adult and continuing education practitioners have to use methods that are productive in order to deliver content to the intended consumers. For this to happen, there is need to pay special attention to programming, andragogical approaches to teaching adults, understanding the learning patterns of adults, and the assessment procedures which are supported by digital age technologies.

- **Adult education program**: In an attempt to transform adult and continuing education, the practitioners thereof need to consider the actual meaning of adult education program as the globe assumes belonging to digital age. According to Foley (2008:97-98), a program may assume a wide range of definitions, but this may focus on one definition as a single educational or training event, a formal course, a collection or set of courses, an individual learning project, a workshop, a colloquium, a conference, or a public education campaign. To remain relevant in adult and continuing education in digital age, the discipline practitioners need to have a program that addresses people's challenges as indicated by their needs relating to how technology may help them either learn or practice what they have learned so that they may have their lives made easy in this digital age.

In the process of delivering content in adult and continuing education, the assumption that is held by the author of this paper is that practitioners need to be sufficiently exposed to the use of technology in the digital age as they communicate and teach to those who need the content. This means that there is no one program that fits all consumers of adult and continuing education due to the fact that adult and continuing education consumers have different education and professional needs when seeking adult and continuing education program as that which solves their problems.

- **Andragogy**: In an attempt to transform adult and continuing education in a digital age, it is important for adult and continuing education practitioners to remain relevant by considering the psychology of learning by which adults learn as reflected by the principles constituting andragogy. Gravett (2008: 70-71) reflects on the different views that classified as American-based and European-based approaches to andragogy, and the following notion comes out:

In the North American literature the concept of andragogy is generally associated with Malcolm Knowles's conceptualization of andragogy. This is generally also the case of South Africa. Knowles (1980: 43) defines andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn. Originally, Knowles defined andragogy in contra-distinction to pedagogy …. Three related terms are used in the European literature, namely andragogy, andragogics, and andragology (Long, 1991). … . Andragogy is any intellectual and professionally guided activity which aims at a change in adult persons. Andragogics is the background of methodical and ideological systems which govern the actual process of andragogy and andragology is the scientific study of both andragogy and andragogics. To confuse the interpretation of the term andragogy even the more, it is not used in a similar way in all European countries and not all countries use this term to refer to the teaching of adult learners.

In the light of the above understanding of the term "andragogy", is quite a challenge to transform adult and continuing education in the digital age, and this complicates it when it comes to being relevant when the variation of understanding of the concept andragogy is quite wide. This, therefore, translates into the notion that for adult and continuing education practitioners, and indeed the discipline, to remain relevant to the communities in the digital age, there is great need to strive to establish a disciplinary common meaning of andragogy on a global scale; and this can be made fast by the use of technology.

- **Adult learning and instruction**: The 21st century has become quite complex in terms of teaching and learning mechanisms, and therefore transforming adult and continuing education with the aim of maintaining relevance in the discipline, practitioners have to think going digital as connoted by Merriam and Bierema (2014: 120-201). The use of technology in the learning processes and giving of instructions in adult and continuing education has become fashionable. In order to remain relevant in adult and continuing education, discipline practitioners,

- **Assessment in adult education:** Shefrin, Shafer, and Forlizzi (2000) wrote an article that was highlighting the assessment tools for adult education, and that they advocate that training needs to be given whenever new assessment tools are in place. The digital age requires that adult and continuing education, especially open distance learning and electronics (ODLE), have teachers of the discipline subjected to the language of marking tools exposed to them. This will help the teaching and learning processes to be manageable in the digital age.

Interview schedules:

To add value to the discussions, four persons attached to adult and continuing education were interviewed. The main motivation for interviewing them was to get views on how practitioners may be relevant in adult and continuing education in the digital age.

Interview with the South African North West Provincial chair for monitoring and evaluation in community education and training revealed that most of the community members view adult and basic education as a basic literacy and numeracy program. She added to say that all community education and training programs in South Africa are basically part-time, as opposed to full-time attending, and that there is very little room for e-learning as most of the program consumers are based in rural areas where internet signals may be a challenge at times. This challenge is worsened, she added, by low levels of computer literacy. In view of this, she identified with the notion that the digital age has presented opportunities for practitioners for development, while challenges cannot be avoided; yet there is a need to motivate most adults to learn how to use computer and other electronic gadgets for formal and none-formal learning. This will help reduce negative effects posed by physical distance which makes formal and none-formal learning quite a challenge.

The South African Eastern Cape former leader in Kharigude mass literacy program connoted that there is a need to make the government and Institutions for higher learning work together as the digital age pushes a handful of both opportunities and challenges. She cited the termination of Kharigude mass literacy program' s negative effects on the people of Eastern Cape of South Africa who did not finish the program on basic education and training levels. She concluded by saying that the Kharigude program could have continued till the program consumers would have gained competences in computer-based kind of learning. As long as this goal is not yet achieved, adult and continuing education practitioners still have a lot of work to do in the digital age.

The principal of the school situated close to the North West University, Mafikeng Campus, affirmed that adult and continuing education needs some improvement in the areas of how post school students who are up-grading should be linked to the university in the neighborhood. Moreover, she indicated that young adults are still challenged by informal use of cellphones which seem to take time for formal and none-formal learning. Amendment in this abuse for good use for academic work will help students to perform better than before. She finally indicated that there is an opportunity for development in South Africa if there can be a way to motivate young adults to use their cellphones for advancing their studies, instead of social networking only, thus there is need for practitioners to be relevant in adult and continuing education.

The fourth respondent was from the South African national department of education and training that is directly linked to post-school adult and community education and training. He said that there is still a lot of work that is needed to be done by adult and continuing education practitioners as long as the formal school system ejects quite a good number of young adults who may need to get the qualifications to work as those from the main stream education background. The thought of digital age provides opportunities, as well as challenges, to the adult and continuing education practitioners in the digital age.

Questionnaires

From the questionnaires, there was an observation that 57 of the 65 respondents indicated that adult and continuing education belonged to the lifelong education discipline hence presenting opportunities for practitioners to remain relevant in the discipline. The respondents indicated that learning does not seem to have an end till life comes to an end. Considering the issue of relevance of adult and continuing education in the digital age, the research identified that 38 of the 65 respondents confirming relevance, and they added that exposure to information technology will make the relevance even more meaningful than ever before.

On asking the respondents to give reasons why adult and continuing education is not attached to some South African university faculties of education of some universities, responses indicated that there are some challenges, and the following challenges, in form of reasons were given: The reasons are not known to many due to lack of exposure to the discipline, as it is not commonly found at some universities.

- Universities focus on youth programs more than they do on adult ones.

- Adult and continuing education seems to be on low demand.

- Adults have no interest to learn.

- Adults are not as economically active as they are expected.

- Generally, it seems that universities have no interest in adult and continuing education, and therefore, they are not able to support the discipline as expected.

- Adults are too lazy to learn new things as long as they do not see them as needs.

- Much research is needed to highlight the causes.

The above challenges indicate that adult and continuing education practitioners have to find innovative ways to make adult and continuing education a needed discipline in the South African universities, and that the universities should be able to view the inclusivity as a benefit, and not a liability.

The respondents were asked to give thoughts on what they thought would be the best way to help adult and continuing education be relevant in adult and continuing education and the communities they expected to offer service; the responses covered the following ways:

- Adults should be encouraged to maximize their potential in the usage of digital devises so that formal and none-formal learning may be supported by this kind of literacy.

- Promoting adult learning will be beneficial.

- Engage adults in the adult and continuing education projects and promotions, and give them necessary support.

- Find ways of creating jobs related to adult and continuing education discipline.

- Making information technology available to some rural areas where internet has been a challenge.

If practitioners and researchers respectively can pay attention to the above stated opportunities, challenges, and innovative ways to support adult and continuing education, the discipline may find favor in the sight of many universities. Knowing the said opportunities, challenges, and innovative ways can help practitioners to be relevant in adult and continuing education in the digital age.

Reviewing of government documents:

According to the Government gazette (South Africa, 2015) on the policy on minimum requirements for programs leading to qualifications for educators and lecturers in adult and community education and training, there is a clear notion that adult and continuing education is a needed discipline in South Africa. The gazette indicates the following learning programs to be developed (South Africa, 2015: 31-32):

- Advanced certificate in adult and community development.

- Diploma in adult and community development.

- Bachelor of adult and community development.

- Advanced diploma in adult and community development.

- Postgraduate diploma in adult and community development.

- Honours degree in adult and community development.

- Master's/Professional master's degree in adult and community development.

- Doctorate/professional doctorate in adult and community development.

There were other seculars within the Republic of South Africa to indicate the value of the government on adult and continuing education in the country for development. Author's personal view is that adult and continuing education, as a discipline, should be paid attention to by those who are in the discipline first so that they may remain relevant in it in this digital age. The need for adult and continuing education is very clear, but there are challenges to the realization of the methodology to even implement the desired goal for the South African nation. My assumption is that this adult and continuing education status is not only confined to South Africa, but it extends to other global countries as well.

Observations:

In South Africa, University of South Africa (UNISA) has been very progressive in adult and basic education and training (ABET) and youth development, as observed by the author of this paper, and therefore may be consulted in issues of assessment in adult education. However, UNISA has not been changing the above mentioned departmental name of 'ABET and Youth Development' as the government has been changing the names of adult education facets such as Adult Education and Training (AET); and that most of its students still use the post office for hard copies (tutorial letters) which has a negative impact on the progress. This is challenging because when the post office goes on strike, then other students have no access to the learning support materials. The thought advanced herein is that there is need to engage consumers of programs to have basic information and technology skills so that they download the tutorial guides for themselves. This is an opportunity for adult and continuing education practitioners to remain relevant in this digital age.

In this context, it should be able to be understood that adult and continuing education has to be relevant in the digital age; as people's lives depend on the current technologies for mobility in this digital age.

9. CONCLUSION

It is critically important to develop an understanding of what adult and continuing education is in this digital age while practitioners do all they can to transform the discipline and develop innovative ways for contributing to knowledge economies in South Africa, as well as the global village.

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