

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Lifelong Learning and Sub-Saharan Africa's Dream of Economic Emancipation

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**Abstract:** Sub-Saharan Africa having remained economically poor throughout its more than sixty years of independence and relying on the finding that the acquisition of a high level of digital and entrepreneurship skills tends to create wealth for nations in modern times, this study investigates the extent to which sub-Saharan Africa's higher education institutions may leverage the facilitation of the learning of digital technologies and entrepreneurship for Africa's economic emancipation through lifelong learning. The work carried out at the level of eight (8) lifelong learning outfits of eight (8) premier universities drawn from the four (4) regions of sub-Saharan Africa is scrutinized through the administration of a six (6)-item questionnaire with a view to establish whether or not Africa's higher education institutions are currently facilitating the learning of digital technologies and entrepreneurship through lifelong learning to a level that may promote Africa's economic emancipation. The findings of the current study are that sub-Saharan Africa (i). possesses very few higher education institutions in comparison to the global average, (ii). is yet to prioritize lifelong learning both nationally and at the higher education level, and (iii). is incapable to produce the needed population of digital and entrepreneurship graduates that may propel its economic emancipation as a result of its current level of neglect of lifelong learning.

**Keywords:** lifelong learning, economic development, digital skills, entrepreneurial skills, Sub-Saharan Africa

## 1. Introduction

Desirous of growth and emancipation, sub-Saharan African nations opted for education as an instrument for social and economic development as soon as most of them attained political independence beginning from the 1960s. By education, it was initially meant, adult literacy education within the realm of non-formal education and primary schooling in formal education [1]. The interest and adoption of both adult literacy and primary education were buoyed by numerous discussions of the benefits conferrable by these two forms of education during the period after independence.

For example, Bowman and Anderson [1] advertised the multiplicity of benefits including personal enlightenment, acquisition of useful social and vocational skills, and benefitting associates with literacy skills that are derivable from the promotion of literacy. In another breath, Patrinos and Psacharopoulos [2] discussed the positive economic returns to education as they concern primary and secondary education within the context of Africa and developing countries. As a result of this high level of interest in both adult literacy and primary education, primary school enrollment rose from 12 million in 1960 to about 51 million in 1983. The number of primary schools increased from 73,000 to 162,000 while the number of primary school teachers rose from 310,000 to 1.3 million during the same period [3]. Similarly, development in the area of secondary education was so phenomenal that with the increase in the number of secondary schools, the

recruitment of secondary school teachers increased eight-folds between the 1960s and 1983 [3].

However, the early 1980s global economic recession [4] came to dampen the faith of sub-Saharan African leaders in the capacity of primary and secondary education to guarantee a future sustainable socio-economic development for the sub-region. Beginning from the 1970s, these leaders had shown interest in developing the higher education sector within their domains. However, majority of international development partners including the World Bank did not lend their support to such a desire before the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE). Therefore, while it can be said that Africa possessed a negligible few higher education institutions (HEIs) before 2009, it was after the 2009 WCHE that Africa was admitted into the Club of countries that could possess HEIs deserving of external support. The hosting of the WCHE coupled with the phenomenal growth registered in the realm of primary and secondary education between 1960 and the 2000s did much to fuel the development and growth of HEIs (especially universities) on the sub-continent. It was within this context that it was stated that,

*Buoyed by new favourable policies and also pressure from the pretertiary sector, countries have registered huge gains in terms of access to higher education. While growth has been universal the region over, some countries have shown phenomenal expansion, if not in gross enrolment ratio but absolute figures. In Tanzania, student enrolment in public and private universities increased from 31,674 in 2003–2004 to 135,365 in 2010–2011—a 327% increase. At the University of Dar-es Salaam while applicants grew from 5,325 (in 2002–2003) to 17,287 (2009–2010), the number of students admitted grew from 2,015 (in 2002–2003) to 6,952 (2009–2010) (Ishengoma, in press;*

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2013). In Senegal, the enrolment at UCAD grew from 24,780 in 2001 to 74,250 in 2012 (Sall, in press)—also a more than 300% growth. The figure for Uganda is also remarkable. It grew from c. 20,000 in 2001 (Musisi, 2003) to close to 180,000 in 2011 (Oboko, 2013). In Ethiopia, the absolute growth has been simply breath-taking—from 79,000 in 1991 to more than 600,000 students in the higher education system in 2012... [5].

However, despite this wonderful growth, African universities are able to offer places for between 0.5% and 7% of qualified candidates only [5]. Unavailability of adequate funding has been found to be mainly responsible for this low enrollment capacity [5]. For example, while the number of university students has since more than tripled, only an average of about 0.78% of African countries' gross domestic product (GDP) continues to be deployed to higher education [5]. Seventy percent of the Overseas Development Aid (ODA) for African higher education that almost doubled between 2002 and 2019 served to pay for African students' study within donor countries [6]. Even these ODA funds that minimally impact the growth of HEIs on African soil have begun to dry up beginning from 2019 [6].

Yet, higher education is at the heart of socio-economic development as it remains the hub of knowledge creation and innovation [7]. Aside from the tendency to broaden world views, higher education produces three general typologies of knowledgeable people, namely holders of Bachelor, Masters, and doctoral levels of training. It is those in the highest rung (the doctors) of this order that usually create much of the knowledge that advances society in a visible and spectacular manner while all three categories of graduates (Bachelor, Masters, and doctoral degree holders) are capable of birthing innovations. In modern times, any societies possessing the three typologies of graduates in appreciable quantities tend to do exceedingly well both economically and socially. Examples of such societies are those currently classified as high-income and upper-middle-income countries [8]. Most of sub-Saharan Africa falls outside these two categories of countries as they can be seen classified as mostly low-income countries, with a negligible few of them as lower-middle-income countries [8]. It is understood that those countries that are today classified as high- and upper-income countries did not achieve these feats overnight but deployed great efforts on the education and job creation fronts over many previous decades. For example, much of western and northern Europe did not become a high-income economy before 2011 while most of central Europe was a low-income region throughout the 1980s and 90s [8]. Having been independent for more than 60 years, most of sub-Saharan Africa has been trying to catch up the rest of the world in the game of matching education and learning with national and regional economic development.

In the meantime, while for a long time, education has remained synonymous to schooling, there has been a gradual paradigm shift towards the adoption of lifelong learning as the global new concept of education [9]. Indeed, item 10 of the Marrakech Framework for Action agreed on, in Morocco during the *International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA) VII*, has come to suggest that beginning from 2022 and going forward, lifelong learning and not schooling is to be conceived as education [10].

Is it possible for Africa to combine the HEIs and LLL dynamics currently subsisting within global paradigm to quicken its own socio-economic development? Has a semblance of foundation been laid that may actualize the dream advanced in the preceding question? The aim of this study is to answer these questions through the unveiling of the state of the art within African HEIs and to chart an innovative pathway of involving Africa's HEIs in directing the promotion of LLL in a way

as to equip sub-Saharan African populations with such skills and attitudes that can quicken economic development.

## 2. Statement of the Research Problem

More than sixty years after political independence, sub-Saharan Africa's performance in the area of national and global economy remains low [8]. Varying combinations of determinants of economic buoyancy have been advertised within the context of the 21st century. One of these combinations highlights the presence of human capital, natural resources, and socio-political structure as one path to economic development [11, 12]. Another combination rather elects availability of natural resources, human resources, technology, and capital formation as a viable route to national economic success [12]. Yet, in the view of UNCTAD [13], going digital and improving access to finance are the two most important requirements for Africa's economic growth and development. In the view of UNCTAD, the veracity and validity of this statement have recently been proven as the African supply chain and finance market rose by 40 percent between 2021 and 2022 [13], precisely because a number of African countries began to improve their performance in these two areas (e.g., digital technologies and access to finance).

A review of all suggestions of determinants of economic development in modern times ultimately retains that human resources (human capital) and access to finance are key to the development of Africa going forward. While a few of these suggestions qualify what they term 'human capital' by specifically isolating digital skills, others describe it simply as 'education'. Additionally, although many of the suggestions mention 'entrepreneurship' as a strategy for accessing global funding (finance), others employ sophisticated financial strategies to achieve the same objective. The main summary of the suggestions holding the door to Africa's economic buoyancy is that learning (education) is indispensable. Since the highest level of education (higher education) usually creates knowledge and generates the greatest impact of learning on society, it is the view of this author that the employment of higher education as an instrument for the advancement of Africa's economic emancipation is the surest path to Africa's sustainable political, social, environmental, and economic deliverance.

Yet, as stated earlier, only a negligible few Africans have access to higher education. Although an average of 48% of OECD citizens, 66% of Canadians, and 69% of South Koreans aged 25–34 years respectively obtained higher education degrees in 2021 [14], only about 7% of Africans continue to access higher education during the same period. The reasons for this disparity are not far-fetched. Assisted by their financial wealth, OECD countries and a number of other countries around the world have established a greater number of higher education institutions and qualitatively more performing university systems than Africa can dream of. For example, boasting the most universities in the world, India paraded 5,288 universities in 2021<sup>1</sup>. The United States of America, Indonesia, China, and Brazil counted 3,216, 2,595, 2,565, and 1,297 universities respectively during the same period<sup>1</sup>. Mexico, Japan, and France had 1,173, 1,063, and 617 universities respectively in 2021<sup>1</sup>. However in 2021, the aforementioned single countries displayed thousands of universities, all 54 countries of Africa combined could parade only a combined figure of 1,279 universities in 2023<sup>2</sup>. While this figure is about the number of universities existing in Brazil alone, it divides into about 24 universities per individual African country in 2023. If one remembers that most of Africa's universities are located within the North African region<sup>2</sup>, it would not be unreasonable to assume that

<sup>1</sup>"Countries with the Most Universities," Ranking Royals, 2022, <https://rankingroyals.com/education/countries-with-the-most-universities/>

<sup>2</sup>"Universities in Africa," uniRank, 2023, <https://www.4icu.org/Africa/>

the distribution of universities within individual sub-Saharan African countries is less than 24 per country. It is not surprising therefore that barely 7% of qualified candidates get enrolled within the African higher education sector. Only a high numeric strength of universities guarantees a high percentage of higher education enrollment and consequently a high population of university graduates within society.

In light of the low-economic performance Africa currently posts, a speedy and near-magical increase in the numeric strength of its higher education institutions is not contemplated. However, there is a two-pronged tweaking of current African situation, which, while not necessarily capable of increasing the number of higher education institutions on the continent, would be able to lay the foundation for Africa's economic emancipation. One aspect of this tweaking concerns the identification and isolation of digital technology and entrepreneurship including financial literacy for massive promotion across the sub-continent while the other aspect is the deliberate choice of the pedagogical process of lifelong learning as a path through which to drive much of future African higher education. Consequently, the objectives and research questions of the current study are the following.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

Two kinds of objectives support this study. They include one main objective and three specific objectives.

#### 3.1. Main objective

The main objective of this study is to determine the extent to which sub-Saharan Africa is currently positioned to drive economic emancipation through LLL in view of the submission in global literature that massive digital technologies education and financial literacy can help achieve Africa's dream of economic development.

#### 3.2. Specific objectives

In a specific sense, this study seeks to

- 1) Identify the drivers of LLL within African HEIs
- 2) Find out the different LLL contents (types of LLL programs) promoted by African HEIs
- 3) Evaluate the weight of digital technology and entrepreneurship programs promoted by African HEIs.

### 4. Research Questions

Following the objectives, the main and specific research questions appearing below guide this investigation.

#### 4.1. Main research question

Are sub-Saharan African HEIs positioned to birth Africa's economic emancipation through a massive promotion of digital technologies education and entrepreneurship/financial literacy using the instrumentality of LLL?

#### 4.2. Specific research questions

- 1) What are the drivers of LLL within African HEIs?
- 2) What are the different types of LLL programs promoted by African HEIs?
- 3) How much digital technology and entrepreneurship learning activity is promoted by African HEIs?

### 5. Purpose of the Study

The conduct of this study aims to make available data that enable to draw inference regarding the possibility of relying on African HEIs-led LLL for Africa's economic development going forward. In other words, the findings of this study have the potential of making available credible information with which to judge whether or not the current performance of African HEIs can lead the continent to the path of economic emancipation.

### 6. Limitations of the Study

Although the data for this study were collected from all the four (4) regions that make up sub-Saharan Africa, only eight (8) out of the more than forty-five (45) countries making up sub-Saharan Africa contributed to the findings of this study. This study did not check whether all forty-five (45) sub-Saharan African countries possess premier universities. Yet, the study did meet the minimum statistic threshold for the ten percent (10%) regarding the size of the sample to be used in a quantitative study. However, perhaps a larger sample size would have revealed other useful data.

### 7. Delimitations of the Study

This study focused on sub-Saharan Africa. As the geographical terminology does imply, the region of focus was that section of Africa below the Sahara, the region within the Sahara being North Africa.

### 8. Literature Review

Both the relevance and currency of the historical perspective of LLL, the adoption of LLL as fundamental human right by the CONFINTEA VII in 2022, and the UIL and SOU publication entitled *International Trends of Lifelong Learning in Higher Education* are acknowledged within the context of this proposal.

#### 8.1. A history of lifelong learning

Within the context of a global historical perspective, one might speak of two general typologies of LLL: one is ancient and the other is modern. A number of learning systems found in traditional cultures including the African traditional culture and the ancient Greek tradition belong to the ancient perspective of LLL [16]. The LLL systems canvassed beginning from the 20<sup>th</sup> century would naturally fall among the modern perspective of LLL [15]. Chief among the modern perspectives of LLL are Britain's [17] and Delors et al.'s [9] publications. Britain's [17] *Interim Report: Industrial and Social Conditions in Relation to Adult Education* highlighted the limits of formal education within the context of national post-World War I reconstruction and societal development and it admonished that learning beyond schooling should be entrenched as public policy in Britain going forward. On its part, Delors et al.'s [9] *Learning: The Treasure Within* sought to deepen the LLL thoughts expressed in UNESCO's earlier publications. Naturally, there have been other seminal publications that did promote modern LLL and these include the works of Benavot et al. [18], Hanemann and Robinson [19], Belete et al. [20], Boeren and Rubenson [21], Stepanek Lockart [22], Sader [23], and Biao [16].

Taken together, the view of the aforementioned authors is that modern lifelong learning implies formal, non-formal, as well as informal education. The implication of this conception of LLL is that the HEI that is involved in the promotion of LLL at the formal, non-formal, and informal didactic levels will be dimmed

to be most productive within the context of the present study. Beyond these publications, there have been global events of tremendous proportion that have come to shape the future (or should one say the 'present situation' as the event is already upon us) of higher education vis-à-vis LLL. These events include the adoption in 2022 of LLL as a fundamental human right by the world and the publication of the *International Trends of Lifelong Learning in Higher Education*.

## 8.2. Lifelong learning as fundamental human right

In its 1966 version, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) did specifically state that education (schooling) is a fundamental human right. That 1966 version is the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* [24]. Articles 13 and 14 of that Covenant advance that free education should be enjoyed by all human beings at least at the primary school level [24]. Before 1966, the popular view has been that formal education could provide the quantity and quality of knowledge, attitude, and skills needed to face up to most social, psychological, and economic challenges during a lifetime [15]. The publication of Faure et al. [25] *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* came to play an instrumental role in diminishing this popular view. Specifically, Faure and others held that at least four reasons (e.g., short shelf life of knowledge, open admission, training for responsibilities, and global citizenship training) support their finding. The meanings and implications of the four reasons adduced by Faure and others follow below.

- 1) **Short shelf life of knowledge:** Knowledge and skills acquired at school which in the past could serve to resolve challenges throughout a lifetime have begun to become ephemeral in assisting human beings in overcoming life challenges. The obvious nature of this observation has been translated in some societies beginning to reject many of the products of institutionalized education [25].
- 2) **Open admission into institution of learning:** Societies in which admission was restrictive into institutions of learning as a result of insistence on specific standardized entry qualifications have begun to become flexible in accepting a variety of entry qualifications for their recently diversified course menus, thereby recognizing a larger variety of interests among potential learners and opening up learning institutions for an ever-increasing number of non-traditional learners.
- 3) **Training for social responsibilities:** Before the 1970s, the concept of development was centered on economic growth. Consequently, much of education and training was geared towards churning out persons that possess the skills to grow the economies of countries. However, with the advent of the 1970s, nations of the world tended to begin to carve an important place for such social and ethical issues as gender equality, diversity, inclusiveness, and justice in their educational space.
- 4) **Tendency to seek for education relevant for globalized citizenship:** Although before the 1970s, most citizens of nations were content to study, work, live their entire life, and die within the borders of their individual countries, the tendency to seek an education type that would permit people to work outside their own countries had begun to grow.

Faure et al. [25] had qualified these four phenomena (reasons) as *trends*. In other words, the phenomena were not necessarily widespread in the 1970s. However, fifty (50) years later (by 2022), the UNESCO CONFITEA (*International Conference on*

*Adult Education*) VII has come to qualify those earlier trends as widespread enough now, to warrant lifelong learning becoming a fundamental human right. Consequently, item 10 of the UIL [10] CONFINTEAVII Marrakech Framework for Action affirms LLL (formal, non-formal, and informal education) as a fundamental human right going forward. On that momentous occasion, in a single act that substituted education (schooling) for lifelong learning as human right, the world declared,

*We strongly affirm education, including ALE, as a fundamental human right—a commitment which is critical in understanding and framing education as a public endeavour and a common good—as asserted by the International Commission on the Futures of Education [10].*

Lifelong learning having become a fundamental human right, enforcing and promoting this new global policy with a sense of strategy, will ultimately benefit Africa in its quest for not only mere economic development but in fast-tracking both economic and social development. In a historical sense, the work of Faure et al. [25] stands as the beginning post of global modern LLL as it was the first publication commissioned by UNESCO in its bid to draw global attention to the need for a paradigm shift in international conception of education. Hence, no important discussion of modern LLL can escape the mention of Faure et al. [25] publication if only to delineate the distance that the world has covered within the context of LLL race between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. How then has the global community and Africa fared promoting LLL these past 52 years?

## 8.3. International trends of lifelong learning (LLL) in higher education (HE)

About the period CONFITEA VII was prepared and held, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning (UIL) and Shanghai Open University (SOU) with the support of the International Association of Universities (IAU) sought to find out the extent to which HEIs across the world were supportive of the cause of LLL. Forty-two (42) or 10.5% of the three hundred and ninety-nine (399) participating universities in that study were African universities [26]. The said study revealed that (i) 50% of African HEIs possessed LLL infrastructures; (ii) fifty percent (50%) of African HEIs possessing LLL infrastructures indicated that they drove their LLL projects through university-community engagement activities, and (iii) only 35% of African HEIs possessing LLL infrastructures actually promoted any credible forms of university-community engagement activities. The study further revealed that while 75% of African HEIs admitted that the need for community engagement was embedded into the mission statements of their HEIs, about 37% of these HEIs indicated that their institutions employed business/industry as driver of university-community engagement although a higher percentage than this did indicate that they were engaged with the private sector [26]. The notion of LLL found to be common with HEIs the world over by UIL and SOU [26] was that of *continuing education* which is a notion narrower in scope than the concept of LLL suggested in the current study and that usually adduced by academic writings on LLL. In other words, if 'education' is often equated with 'schooling' or 'formal education', 'continuing education' is usually understood to be a form of learning that takes place after schooling whether or not schooling was completed. However, lifelong learning is broader than these earlier two concepts as it includes both and more.

The UIL and SOU [26] study marks a commendable beginning of the tracing of the performance of LLL in HEIs across the world during which data were collected only from such HEIs that

willingly enrolled on the study. While a number of credible inferences may be made from this data at this point, a few more studies such as this would be needed in the future before more robust conclusions can be drawn as to the health of LLL in HEIs across the world.

In the case of Africa, the forty-two (42) HEIs that participated in the *International Trends of Lifelong Learning in Higher Education* study were neither representative of sub-Saharan HEIs nor did the study pointedly address the issue of sub-Saharan Africa's economic development through lifelong learning. Consequently, the current study wishes to focus enquiry on the critical mass of HEIs in sub-Saharan Africa that prioritize the promotion of the acquisition of digital technology and entrepreneurship skills within a context of LLL that implicates African HEIs into the formal, non-formal, and informal promotion of these two knowledge areas.

In a conceptual sense, LLL is a learning spectrum comprising formal, non-formal, and informal education and learning. However, in a practical sense, all HEIs tend to run continuing education which is often a non-formal in-secondary and/or post-secondary typology of education. A number of these continuing education offerings operate curricula contents that enable non-formal in-secondary learners to proceed to formal secondary and/or tertiary education and post-secondary learners to mainstream into formal tertiary education. However, in practical terms, most continuing education programs are not equipped with the ability to assess and profit by learners' prior learning which constitutes the informal aspect of LLL. Consequently, most HEIs' continuing education programs are non-formal in nature with a number of them possessing the ability to mainstream their clients into the formal education system. Only a negligible number of the programs are able to operationalize informal education in their functioning.

For the purpose of this study, the HEIs' continuing education programs selected were non-formal education programs with the ability to mainstream clients into formal education programs at various points of study. The continuing education programs of at least two of the HEIs studied are suspected to have the capacity to assess prior learning (this information was not specifically sought in the study) for the purpose of admission into learning programs, these two HEIs' continuing education programs (e.g., Nigeria's and Ghana's) being the two oldest on the African sub-continent. Consequently, for the purpose of this study, LLL is continuing education with or without capacity for screening for prior learning.

## 9. Methodology

The methodology of this study highlights the research paradigm, approach, and design, and the population and sample that attended the study. This section equally discusses the instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis method, and the ethical considerations that supported the study.

### 9.1. Paradigm, approach, and design

This study was conceived as an empirical study whose conduct was approached in a way as to generate quantitative data. The survey design was employed in collecting data.

### 9.2. Population and sample

The population of the study was made up of all the premier HEIs (First government-established universities) existing within sub-Saharan Africa while the sample for the study was purposefully drawn as to cover all the four (4) regions of the sub-continent,

namely West Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, and Central Africa. Two countries were drawn from each region of the sub-continent, namely Nigeria and Ghana from West Africa, Kenya and Rwanda from east Africa, Zimbabwe, and Botswana from southern Africa and Congo DR and Cameroun from Central Africa. As a result of the main criterion (e.g., national premier university) adopted in determining the main characteristic of the sample for the study, only one university qualified to be drawn from each of the sampled countries. Consequently, two universities were studied per region making up a total of eight (8) sampled universities.

### 9.3. Instruments

A six-item questionnaire was developed to collect the data that were analyzed. The first questionnaire item sought to find out whether or not the institution studied possessed any LLL policy. The second item sought to know the reasons for which the institution was promoting LLL while the third item looked for information regarding the drivers (strategies) through which LLL was driven. The fourth item was designed as to elicit information on the kinds of university structures (academic departments, faculties, etc.) that were involved in the promotion of LLL within the institution. The fifth item requested for information on the specific learning programs (digital technology education, entrepreneurial education, financial literacy, etc.) that were taught by the HEI while the sixth item sought data on the approximate weights of LLL learning programs in relation to all LLL programs on the one hand and the approximate weights of LLL programs in relation to the same learning programs as taught conventionally within the HEI.

The content validity of the instrument was hinged upon the knowledge of the author in LLL that enabled him to select appropriate items relating to the correlational relationship that needs to exist between LLL and digital technologies and financial literacy. No pilot study that may have produced a reliability score of the instrument was conducted because only a single stream and non-ambivalent (e.g., yes or no) answer was required in the case of this instrument.

### 9.4. Data collection procedure

One electronic copy of the questionnaire whose development was completed in February 2024 was sent out to a contact within each of the eight sampled HEIs between March and April 2024. Each of the contacts is personally known to the researcher. These known contacts were either Deans of Faculties or Heads of Department within specific HEIs. By the middle of April 2024, all the completed copies of the questionnaire were returned.

### 9.5. Data analysis method

Frequency and percentage were the two main methods of data analysis employed in the study. These are adequate methods to employ in a quantitative study.

### 9.6. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations embrace the whole domain of research integrity. While no efforts have been spared in ensuring integrity throughout this study, special care was taken in upholding the dignity and respect due to the human participants in the study. Even though the respondents to the questionnaire are known to the researcher, the copies of the said questionnaire were not forwarded to them before the researcher obtained their permission to send in the instrument. The process of serving the research instrument having been handled

in this manner, it is believed that the human participants in this study who were chief executives and heads of academic units in their respective HEIs must have relied on documents and personnel available to them in addition to their own institutional memory to accomplish the completing of the questionnaire.

## 10. Findings

Table 1 below lays out the findings as they were collected from participating institutions in the study.

Table 1 indicates that data were collected from premier HEIs drawn from eight countries including Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Botswana, the Congo, and Cameroun. These eight countries were drawn from all the four regions (e.g., west, east, south, and central) making up sub-Saharan Africa in a bid to work with a sample that is representative of the population of this study. Four of the premier universities in these countries had no LLL policy in place while four of the premier universities in Ghana, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Botswana had.

The reasons for promoting LLL were pretty varied across the universities. In Nigeria, Kenya, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and Botswana, the desire to enhance university revenue as well as the wish to fulfill the social corporate responsibility drove the promotion of LLL. In contrast, Ghanaian, Congolese, and Cameroonian universities got involved with LLL mainly for the purpose of actualizing their social corporate responsibility towards the communities and countries in which they are located.

The drivers of LLL in Nigeria and Ghana were found to be predominantly university-industry collaboration, university-community engagement, and research. On the contrary, university-community engagement and research were recorded as drivers of LLL in Kenya, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Botswana, the Congo, and Cameroun.

In four of the countries studied (Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda), university academic departments, faculties, and university centers of continuing education were the structures (units) through which LLL was promoted. In the remaining four countries (Zimbabwe, Botswana, the Congo, and Cameroun), only academic departments were used in offering LLL.

Table 1 equally shows that Nigeria and Ghana paraded a rich array of LLL programs including digital technologies, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Apart from Kenya and Zimbabwe that offered entrepreneurship and financial literacy respectively in addition to social sciences and humanities, the remaining countries dwelt mainly in offering sciences and humanities through LLL.

In relation to all learning programs within the university, 20%, 17%, 15%, 8%, 5%, 4%, and 3% of learning programs were offered through LLL in Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, the Congo, and Cameroun, respectively. When the prevalence of digital technologies, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy learning through LLL was checked for, it was found that Nigeria offered 30% of entrepreneurial learning and 20% each of digital technologies and financial literacy learning. Ghana offered 30% of entrepreneurial learning, 22% of financial literacy learning, and 15% of digital technologies learning. Zimbabwe offered 40% of financial literacy while Kenya offered 35% entrepreneurship learning. Other universities deployed only negligible action in the promotion of digital technologies, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy.

## 11. Discussion of Findings

This study set out to determine whether in spite of the paucity of the number of HEIs in sub-Saharan Africa, LLL could be activated to

drive economic development within the sub-continent by emphasizing the promotion of two main learning areas, namely digital technologies, entrepreneurship, and/or financial literacy. Global literature identifies the knowledge of digital technologies and the possession of financial management skill by a critical mass of society as a sine qua non for the achievement of economic development [13]. Since in order for the mastery of these two knowledge areas to lead to tangible social-economic achievement, it needs to be achieved at the higher education level and since Africa currently lacks the requisite number of HEIs capable of assisting it in reaching this goal, the LLL system possessing the potential of expanding the education net of society without increasing the numeric strength of HEIs has been identified as a path that can ultimately lead sub-Saharan Africa to economic emancipation. But is sub-Saharan Africa currently positioned to take advantage of this opportunity?

### 11.1. The variables of this study

The two variables in this study are 'LLL' and 'Economic development'. 'LLL' is the independent variable while 'Economic development' is the dependent variable. Although discussions regarding Africa's economic development involving digital technologies and finance are rife [13], the status of LLL remains virtually unknown in African HEIs not only because the practice of LLL is hardly visible within this sector but also because only a negligible number of LLL researches have so far targeted Africa's HEIs [26]. The few studies that have discussed LLL and Africa's HEIs have investigated the understanding of LLL by the continental institutions and the pathways through which these institutions carried out the few LLL programs they ran [26]. As such, there is no known study, to this author, that had investigated the viability of African HEIs' LLL within the context of the pursuit of Africa's economic emancipation whose findings may be compared to those of the current study.

### 11.2. The sample of this study

Although there existed about 45 countries in sub-Saharan Africa at the time of this study and although a number of sub-Saharan Africa's countries have recently encouraged the establishment of a number of private universities and at least one Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution within their territories, yet, this study sought data from only eight (8) countries and from only eight (8) premier universities. Premier universities are a big deal in Africa. They are viewed and treated with great awe by all, and they are propped up to set the pace within the domain of higher education on a national scale. For example, they usually are the HEIs with the largest capacity for student enrollment, with the biggest government financial and material support and with the most prestige in the eyes and minds of prospective students and parents. Consequently, African premier universities are viewed as pacesetters within the higher education realm. Where private universities (who are usually of smaller size) do show greater dynamism in revenue mobilization and a few rare innovation zones, premier universities maintain their dominance in the domain of quantity and quality staffing having benefitted from decades of national and international support in the development of both academic and non-academic robust staff training programs.

As a result of the foregoing, the data relied upon in this study that is obtained from premier universities drawn from all the four (4) regions making up sub-Saharan Africa is not only of value and credible, it is equally representative of the health of LLL within the sub-continent.

**Table 1**  
**Findings of the study**

S/N	REGIONS	COUNTRIES	RESPONSES						
			LLL policy	Reason for LLL	Drivers of LLL	Structures for LLL	LLL programs	% LLL programs	
								Within LLL Program Only	In relation to all Univ. Programs
West Africa									
		Nigeria	Yes	*Rev *SR	*IC *CE *RE	*Depts *Facs *Uni-wide	*DigitTech *Entrepren. *Finan Lite * Sciences *Soci scien *Humanities	20 30 20 10 10 10	20
		Ghana	Yes	*SR	*IC *CE *RE	*Depts *Facs *Uni-wide	*DigitaTech *Entrepren. *Finan Liter *Soci scien *Humanities	15 30 22 18 15	17
East Africa									
		Kenya	No	*Rev *SR	*CE *RE	*Depts *Facs *Uni-wide	*Entrepren. *Soci scien *Humanities	35 20 45	5
		Rwanda	No	*Rev *SR	*IC *RE	*Depts *Facs *Uni-wide	*Soci scien *Humanities	48 52	4
Southern Africa									
		Zimbabwe	Yes	*Rev *SR	*CE *RE	*Depts	*Finan Lit. *Soci scien *Humanities	40 30 30	15
		Botswana	Yes	*Rev *SR	*CE *RE	*Depts	*Finan *Soci scien *Humanities	50 30 20	8
Central Africa									
		Congo DR	No	*SR	*CE *RE	*Depts	*Soci scien *Humanities	40 60	4
		Cameroun	No	*SR	*CE *RE	*Depts	*Soci scien *Humanities	50 50	3

\*Rev = Revenue generation

\*SR = Social Corporate Responsibility

\*CE = Community Engagement

\*RE = Research

\*IC = Industry-University Collaboration

### 11.3. Current status of lifelong learning in African HEIs

Although only four of the eight HEIs studied had LLL policies, all the eight HEIs ran some amount of LLL as a percentage of their total learning programs. For example, between 3 and 20% of all the learning programs were found to have been migrated onto the LLL mode, with Nigeria, Ghana, and Zimbabwe posting the highest percentages of 20%, 17%, and 15%, respectively.

Judging from the very low number of HEIs existing in Africa, a maximum of 20% of LLL programs within premier universities and by implication within the sub-continent is low indeed. The inference from this finding is that only a negligible number of LLL learners is really added to the number of regular students of African HEIs which currently stands at a maximum of only 7% of qualified candidates. Therefore, this LLL percentage point does not move the needle in terms of the population of African youth that ought to access digital technologies and entrepreneurship/financial literacy for the purpose of Africa's economic emancipation. Instead, this low percentage point suggests that African HEIs are yet to prioritize LLL. Both the extant low percentage of LLL programs in the African HEIs and the low priority currently accorded LLL in these institutions are not surprising as the development and existence of LLL policies in only four of the eight HEIs is the foundational indicator that LLL is yet to be prioritized on the sub-continent. So long as Africa's HEIs would not develop LLL policies with a view to increasing LLL learners intake in the specific domains of digital technologies and entrepreneurship/financial literacy, so long shall the dream of Africa's economic emancipation remain just a dream.

In regard to the reasons for which LLL is promoted in Africa's premier HEIs, albeit minimally, revenue generation has been cited as the most frequent and powerful reason for the said promotion. About 63% (5 out of 8) cited revenue generation as motivation for running LLL programs in Africa's premier HEIs. In addition to highlighting the precariousness of LLL in Africa's HEIs, this finding indicates the extent to which Africa's HEIs lack adequate funding in the execution of their educational mandate. While it is legitimate for Africa's HEIs to target fees collectable from LLL clients as supplemental funding, it is to be noted that the promotion of LLL within Africa at this current time is first and foremost a social interest and corporal responsibility that demands massive social commitment. Under a situation such as this, there exists a level of tuition fee charge beyond which a considerable population of potential LLL clients may be excluded. Consequently, if HEIs in sub-Saharan Africa are to ultimately increase the number of learners within the domains of digital technologies and entrepreneurship/financial literacy, they may need to devise additional fund mobilization strategies beyond tuition fee charging.

The drivers of LLL carry some implications for the plausibility of using LLL for Africa's future economic emancipation. In other words, the process or activity track through which LLL is implemented may indicate the extent to which the notion of economic development is emphasized in the promotion of LLL. This study's findings show that out of eight (8) institutions, only two (2), the premier universities in Nigeria and Ghana or 25% of all studied institutions employed a combination of industry-university collaboration, university-community engagement, and research to implement LLL. The remaining six (6) institutions used mainly university-community engagement and research to implement LLL. Apart from supporting higher education financially and materially, industry or business-university collaboration does provide knowledge and technical know-how in strategies designed for economic emancipation of whole societies. Yet, this is a strategic

process for implementing LLL that whole 75% of HEIs in Africa are not using. Every chain being as strong as its weakest link, it has become imperative, that attention be drawn not only to the necessity of promoting LLL but also to the most cost-effective and economy-stimulating way of carrying out this promotion.

The institutional structure (academic department, faculty, etc.) through which LLL is dispensed equally has its own story to tell within the context of the dispensation of LLL in Africa. The current study shows that all but two (2) HEIs promoted LLL through a combination of academic departments, faculties, and university-wide network. Within a standard higher education structure, academic departments are the smallest units of learning. Faculties are usually made up of a number of academic departments while the university is made up of a number of faculties. By 'university-wide' structure, it is meant here that the university possesses a centralized unit specifically designed to coordinate its LLL activities. This coordinating unit is usually labeled 'center for continuing education' in many universities. The more academic departments that there are which participate in the promotion of LLL within an institution, the higher the tendency of having many more LLL clients, academic departments being more in number and offering a greater variety of learning programs than any other academic units. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the institutions surveyed here had their academic departments implicated in the promotion of LLL. This suggests that a fairly higher number of LLL clients have been captured than would have been the case and had a lower number of academic departments been netted. The worry however is that even this fairly good netting of LLL clients would not reduce in any significant way the large population of African youth waiting to benefit from higher education. This is because the massive African out-of-higher-education population (about 93% of qualified learners) would not be absorbed by the few academic departments that run LLL programs. Neither would the work of these few academic departments significantly increase the population of digital technologies and entrepreneurial graduates in Africa, judging from the low percentage points of current LLL intake across the sub-continent. Only about a ten-fold ramping up of current work in the domain of LLL can begin to put a dent in the levels of illiteracy currently being experienced by Africa in the areas of digital technologies and entrepreneurship.

What then are the specific learning programs taught through LLL by sub-Saharan Africa's HEIs? The current study indicates that a wide range of learning programs are taught through LLL in Africa. These include digital technologies, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, sciences, social sciences, and humanities courses. However, only two (2) out of the eight (8) HEIs surveyed taught these many learning programs. These are the HEIs of Nigeria and Ghana. Others taught only a fraction of these courses. Additionally, not all HEIs ran programs in digital technologies and entrepreneurship. While Zimbabwe and Botswana ran programs in financial literacy, they did not run programs in digital technologies. A combination of digital technologies and entrepreneurship/financial literacy was dispensed only by institutions in Nigeria and Ghana and at very low percentage (e.g., at about 20 percentage point of all LLL courses). Knowing that the LLL courses themselves were very lowly taught in relation to all African HEIs courses (between 3 and 15% across board), the current study suggests that the teaching and learning of digital technologies and entrepreneurship/financial literacy is low indeed across Africa.

## 12. Conclusion

The quest for sub-Saharan Africa's economic emancipation may take more than one route. However, for it to be sustainable,



it must be rooted in learning and global partnership. Currently, the global community is engaged with lifelong learning and has actually adopted lifelong learning as a fundamental human right not for the sake of participating in some leisure activity but for the sake of survival and relevance. While sub-Saharan Africa is currently playing the catch-up game in the general domain of the promotion of lifelong learning, this article shows the way to a viable shortcut to Africa's sustainable and rapid economic emancipation and competitiveness.

As it has been shown here, the route to quick economic emancipation (e.g., the massive promotion of digital technologies and entrepreneurship) as elucidated in this write-up is one which sub-Saharan Africa is yet to be ready to travel as a result of its lack of preparedness. To be ready to engage in this travel, all countries of sub-Saharan Africa would need first to endow themselves with national policies on lifelong learning. Second, they would need to support their HEIs in the advancement of LLL, and third, they would need to seek vigorous international cooperation in this area.

### 13. Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of the current study suggest the following areas for future research.

#### 13.1. Replication of the current study

The report of this study suggests that no study has discussed the variables taken up by the current study before. It is therefore recommended that the current study should be replicated with a view to (i). making available both a larger pool of works and ever current information in the domain of LLL and economic development and (ii). generating cohorts of data that may facilitate comparison of developing situations within the field going forward.

#### 13.2. Working on developing capacity in fully operationalizing the practice of LLL

This study reveals that not all African HEIs facilitate the needed interaction among the three tiers of LLL, namely the formal, non-formal, and informal education and learning. This is because not all HEIs' continuing education programs mainstream their clients back into the formal education system and only a few continuing education programs have capacity to assess prior learning for the purpose of admitting learners into learning programs. Consequently, studies are needed to unearth both the number of Africa's HEIs that run continuing education programs and the capacity of these HEIs to integrate the three tiers of LLL and to test for prior learning.

#### Ethical Statement

This study does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects performed by the author.

#### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest to this work.

#### Data Availability Statement

The data used to support the findings of this study are available upon request to the corresponding author.

### Author Contribution Statement

**Idowu Biao:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration.

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