

## The Importance of Gerontology in Modern Universities in the African Continent

Dama Mosweunyane\*

University of Botswana, Department of Lifelong Learning and Community Development

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\*Corresponding author: Dama Mosweunyane, University of Botswana, Department of Lifelong Learning and Community Development. E-mail: mosweunyane@ub.ac.bw

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### ABSTRACT

The twenty first century has placed gerontology as highly important which stems mainly from the fact that it allows for the germane researches that can benefit the aged populations of the African continent. It has raised to prominence in the Western countries because of its accommodative eminence that allows for biological, sociological, political, social and economic aspects that affect the aged population in both the North and South. Research in the field of gerontology can guide the universities to provide the best programmes that will equip the organisations to best cater for the aged populations that in most instances vulnerable. Most often than not, the aged populations do not receive the care and scientific prescriptions that could ameliorate their living conditions. It is very important to state that most universities in the African continent do not have programmes in gerontology, through which scientific researchers can be engaged to generate knowledge that can enhance the identity of the field. The elderly are often lowly regarded by their communities and remain vulnerable despite massive contributions that they make and through sharing knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary for the economic, political, educational, technological, social advancement of their countries. The challenges of senility and senescence that are associated with old age should be researched on so that they are impact on the elderly can be understood. The African universities should shoulder the responsibilities for knowledge creation in the field of gerontology for the benefit of both the elderly and practitioners.

The paper is intended to show the importance of gerontology and how its association with adult education can benefit the elderly who are most often neglected.

**Keywords:** Gerontology, Biological, Sociological, Political, Economic, Universities, African Continent, Adult Education and Aged Population

### 1. Introduction

It is important to note that the advancement in western medicine has resulted in the improvement of life expectancy in most parts of the world including in the African continent. This means more people grow to become septuagenarians (seventy to seventy-nine years old) and beyond. It is therefore important for more knowledge to be availed to meet the exigencies of the elderly, hence the need for the popularisation of gerontology in institutions of higher learning alongside adult education, adult learning, lifelong learning, non-formal education and continuing

education. As noted by the Gerontological Society of America<sup>1</sup> Gerontology is the study of aging processes and individuals across the life course. The Gerontological Society of America further elaborates that gerontology studies physical, mental, and social changes in people as they age, investigates the changes in society resulting from the aging population and the application of that knowledge to policies and programs. It is important to note that the aging population is often neglected and least understood in the Africa continent, where less resources are spent in research compared to America and European continents.

It is therefore undisputable that the need for more knowledge on aging should be generated and disseminated by universities for the benefit of the elderly people themselves and policy makers who should meet their exigencies. Most importantly, the apt programmes in gerontology should be designed to equip practitioners with knowledge, skills and apposite attitudes for the profession. The universities in Africa as in other parts of the world provide the necessary training, professional services and community services for social transformation, which cannot be achieved with the exclusion of the adult populations.

The universities in Africa should enhance and foster transformative paths to ascertain that people age gracefully, instead of getting ridiculed and in some cases labelled by superstitious communities as witches and wizards. As observed by Karger<sup>2</sup> understanding the mechanisms of aging and age-related diseases has become an urgent matter given the growing proportion of older adults in the population. This book chapter is meant to advocate for gerontology in African universities because of its importance in helping the adult population.

## 2. Psychological Facets of Aging

It is important to note that people face psychological challenges as they age partly because their body parts deteriorate, making them more vulnerable. As noted by UF Health<sup>3</sup> everyone must contend with physical and mental declines as they age, not to mention the growing risk of getting attacked by diseases. Life events, such as retirement, relocation and the death of loved ones often take their toll on aging individuals. Some elderly people are thanatophobia, (fear of death), which often make them more anxious when their age mates or partners pass on. This happens because of their frail bodies and the understanding that they are mortals. In most cases the elderly see themselves as being next on the queue of the dying, which frustrates those of them who are thanatophobic or fear their demise. As observed by Cleveland clinic<sup>4</sup> one study suggests that elderly people are more likely to fear the dying process, while young adults are more likely to fear death itself. Another study found that the children of elderly parents actually had a higher level of death anxiety than their parents, peaking at around middle age. It is important to note that the fear of death has negative psychological effects on the elderly, which can cause them not to relate to their milieus with the required level of confidence and to lead their lives meaningfully. The adults because of the fear of death may spend their lives not as sociable and interactive as they would otherwise be. They may not participate in the learning activities that are designed for them, as they may feel they will die and therefore not benefit from the knowledge and skills that they will have acquired.

The departure to the envisaged but unknown destinations brings psychological torment on them. According to Ohio University<sup>5</sup> Gero psychology is a specialty of psychology that applies clinical psychology and research to the population of older adults. Gero psychologists address a variety of issues that affect older adults, such as loss of loved ones, relocation, medical conditions, and changes in employment status, memory, and family relationships. It is therefore important for African universities to offer courses such as Gero psychology that students can enrol for and become Gero psychologists upon completion. The research projects that would be undertaken will contribute to the knowledge base and influence decisions that should benefit

the adult population in the African continent, which due to its cultural beliefs does in some cases abuse the elderly members of the communities, claiming that they are sorcerers. It is common in some communities in Africa for elderly people to get accused of witchcraft that casts spells of misfortunes on other people. As noted by Motsoeneng<sup>6</sup> Characteristics of the elderly, commonly used to accuse people of witchcraft (such as old age, bad health, red or yellow eyes, wrinkled skin, missing teeth, or a hunched-back stance), are impossible for them to escape.

Some common diseases amongst the elderly people compromise their cognitive abilities, which can result in them not identifying where they are. They often get lost and stray into places where they are not supposed to be. They often get lost and their situation strengthens the claims that they come into places where they are not supposed to be because of witchcraft. According to Hyung Hong et. al<sup>7</sup> a few recent studies suggest that anaemia or abnormal haemoglobin concentrations are associated with an increased risk for dementia and rapid cognitive decline among the elderly. It is important to note that symptoms of dementia are memory problems, particularly remembering recent events, increasing confusion, reduced concentration, personality or behaviour changes, apathy and withdrawal or depression and loss of ability to do everyday tasks. As a result of the challenges associated with declining cognitive aptitude, more studies are necessary to determine how best the communities in Africa can be educated in order to best know how to relate with the elderly people.

More knowledge about what the elderly people experience has the potential to make them receive appropriate and timely interventions than to have their conditions aggravated because of lack of support from professionals, such as psychologists in universities. As stated by Olajide and Ayantunji<sup>8</sup> ageing occur as a result of cessation of cell division that takes place in the human beings. Today, ageing and anti-aging have become a global phenomenon and the endless struggle against becoming old and the refusal to accept changes in the body.

The elderly often feel neglected and therefore vulnerable, which requires support from institutions with perfect professional understanding. This should be understood as a requirement for more research by institutions. It is disquieting that African institutions unlike those in Europe, Asia and America, do not conduct research that can provide comprehensive findings and recommendations for the field of gerontology. The establishment of centres is viewed as important in enriching the field of gerontology and adult education, hence both fields becoming pivotal and at the centre stage of making aging a successful process. It is important to state that the existence of successful ageing theory has made gerontology even more relevant. As noted by Annele, Satu and Timo<sup>9</sup> successful ageing has become an important concept to describe the quality of ageing. It is a multidimensional concept, and its main focus is how to expand functional years in a later life span. It is important for Africa universities to participate in research projects that can answer some of the questions that require scientific findings. In America for instance, as stated by Gibbons<sup>10</sup>, the basic research at molecular level aimed at preventing the degenerative diseases of old age- or actually postponing the aging process itself is what gerontological researchers are working on. Using the tools of molecular biology, they are teasing out the many factors that cause cells to “senesce”.

The concept has developed from a biomedical approach to a wider understanding of social and psychological adaptation processes in later life. The understanding of gerontology can be achieved through the establishment of centres within the universities in Africa, the purpose of which should be to conduct research projects that are particularly designed to provide better understanding of psychological developments pertaining to ageing. Interestingly, as observed by Guerrero, Huerta and Pourat<sup>11</sup>, the centres should be designed to enhance the diversity of the aging research workforce by mentoring promising scientists from under-represented groups for sustained careers in aging research in priority areas of social, behavioural, and economic research on aging. It is important to note that gerontological studies should be given due priority because as noted by Booker caring for older adults in a global context requires knowledge and understanding of cultures and their values and practices. With a growing population of diverse older adults, there is a need for incorporation of more gerontological education in nursing curricula and clinical experiences. The need for the development of theories is critical in institutions of higher learning, if gerontology is to have an enriched knowledge base through research. Theory as stated by Alley, Putney, Rice and Bengtson<sup>12</sup> serves at least three critical purposes in research on aging: to guide research questions and hypotheses, to help explain research findings, and to inform interventions to solve aging-related problems. Even if they are not made explicit, theoretical orientations and assumptions influence the research questions we select and the methods we use to address them.

The field of psychology and adult education can both immensely benefit from centres that are gerontological and based on what adults in Africa can identify with because of the contextual relevance. In South Africa, the South African Journal of Gerontology does publish articles. However, over a decade or longer, authors have experienced difficulty in having research published in international journals. A lack of two-way exposure during this period stunts the development of gerontology in the country. The lack of international recognition of articles written in the Republic of South Africa by South African Journal of Gerontology points to how African contributions to the field of gerontology is compromised both continentally and internationally. This provides justification for more research in the field of gerontology by African scholars and researchers, so that the necessary influence globally can be achieved. According to National Research Council<sup>13</sup>, in sub-Saharan Africa, older people are supported primarily by family and other kinship networks. They have traditionally been viewed as repositories of information and wisdom, and are critical pillars of the communities. It is important for universities to make sure that elderly people who possess very important knowledge and skills are provided with opportunities through which they can enrich posterity.

The arrangement has the potential to particularly preserve indigenous knowledge that most African communities are struggling to keep and pass from generation to generation. As noted by Knopf<sup>14</sup>, according to a Western logo-centric and Carte-Newtonian understanding of the academy, sciences, and humanities, indigenous knowledge is viewed as primitive, folkloric, anecdotal, unscientific, a methodological, insignificant, and lacking scientific rigor and objectivity. The gerontological studies should be more accommodative of indigenous knowledge because that is beneficial for the elderly

people, who in most instances possess knowledge and skills that are germane for their respective communities but are lowly regarded by professionals who hold exotic contributions in high regard. The prejudice towards the elderly is often perpetuated by professionals and non-professionals alike, leading Reynolds, Jeste, Sachdev, and Blazer<sup>15</sup> to state that, aging and older adults are often discussed by the general public and the media using negative stereotypes, such as a decline in mental and cognitive function. Unfortunately, this type of pejorative view of later life may be internalized by older individuals themselves and enacted, creating a vicious circle resulting in poor mental health.

It is important to acknowledge that the elderly people are well experienced in most areas because of the experiments that they would have undertaken at the time they reach their advanced ages. In most African communities' elderly people would have knowledge of indigenous plants and their medicinal properties because of having used them for a lengthy duration. The traditional healers in African communities are often versed with important skills such as surveying of water, midwifery, reading of stars and application of tourniquets on fractured people and animals. It is worthy to note that the elderly are vulnerable and often get fractured because as they age their bones become weaker. According to Chapurlat<sup>16</sup> for instance, roughly half the women who have reached menopause have fragility fractures. Such fractures impose major burdens, such as complications, cost, and death. A variety of effective therapies are available, yet in general they are underused. It is important for research projects to be conducted by African universities to unearth the reasons for the underutilisation of therapies as alluded to by Chapurlat.

The gerontological studies are important in identifying how such knowledge get affected when stored over a lengthy period of time by elderly people. An investment by universities in research projects that identify how information gets processed by the adults is important in making sure that they avoid those activities that can compromise their knowledge retention processes. The healthcare system should be accommodative of geriatrics, which is a medical specialty focused on care and treatment of elderly people. The nursing departments do exist within universities in Africa, making it important for such entities to undertake research projects in gerontology, which can benefit the African institutions and the entire continent. In driving the point home, Carson-Newman University<sup>17</sup> noted that gerontology nursing programs should provide nursing students with knowledge and skills that allow them to deal with stressful events such as patients' deaths and enable them to recover from depression quickly.

Amongst the interesting studies that can also be undertaken in the field of gerontology is the review of the literature by reputable scholars such as Elie Metchnikoff (1845-1916). Evidently, Elie Metchnikoff (1845-1916), is known to be the father of gerontology and is celebrated to have discovered *phagocytosis*, which can form a bases for more research. More research projects are necessary by universities in Africa to generate more knowledge on phagocytosis and how it can benefit the adult population. As noted by Uribe-Querol and Rosales<sup>18</sup>, professional phagocytes are responsible for removing microorganisms and of presenting antigens to lymphocytes in order to activate an adaptive immune response. Fibroblasts, epithelial cells, and endothelial cells can also accomplish phagocytosis with low-efficiency and are thus described as non-professional phagocytes. These cells cannot

ingest microorganisms, but are important in eliminating dead cells and maintaining homeostasis. The need for demystification of phagocytosis cannot be overemphasised because better understanding has the potential to motivate more research for the benefit of gerontology.

### 3. Social Facets of Aging

It is clear that gerontology has developed much interest in the social dimension of aging and the reasons are obvious. The elderly people are part of communities and play crucial functions that cannot be ignored. As noted by Kricheldorf, Kirsten, Himmelsbach, and Thiesemann<sup>19</sup> social gerontology is seen as a science-based but application-oriented sub-discipline of gerontology. It focuses particularly on social relationships in old age, social participation of elderly and old people and the protection of their individual needs. It is evident that social gerontology requires more research, so that gaps that currently exist can be addressed. The reliance of gerontology on literatures generated by other areas of study calls for institutions in Africa to strengthen the field of gerontology through contributions that are research informed. As indicated by Rose<sup>20</sup>:

A new field of research, especially one dealing with a social problem, is likely to emerge without using any explicit theory, and then gradually to adapt general theoretical formulations already in use in kindred fields. Thus, the earliest research in social gerontology was descriptive in character, but soon concepts like "adjustment," "role changes," "loss of roles," "changing self-concept" were borrowed from symbolic-interactionist theory in social psychology—a theoretical position to which many of the early social gerontologists adhered.

Evidently, noting from what Rose pointed out, the need for more research to enrich social gerontology cannot be overemphasised. This calls for African institutions to embark on researches that could benefit the ageing individuals within the communities. The African gerontologists according to Adamek, Kotecho, Chane and Gebeyaw<sup>21</sup> have identified the following areas as requiring due attention: The key challenges of African older adults as noted by scholars were poverty and lack of aging professionals, lack of governments attention to aging issues, lack of funding by governments to establish international partnerships remain as key concerns. It also emerged that the assets of sub-Saharan African older adults need to be considered in development efforts and gerontology networks in sub-Saharan Africa, to plan for the coming demographic shift. The populations of elderly people are viewed and treated differently by different cultures making social gerontology much more important as a branch of broader gerontology.

The problem of social exclusion is a challenge that social gerontologists are concerned about, which dictates that more research be conducted to broaden understanding of the problems that victims of social exclusion experience. As observed by Wethington, Pillmer and Principi<sup>22</sup> social exclusion among older adults include aging-related characteristics such as deteriorating health, retirement, decreases in income, separation from former social networks, discrimination and prejudice against older people (ageism), and lack of community resources that promote interaction with others. Older adults with a lifetime of material disadvantage are particularly at risk for social exclusion.

It is worthy to note that it is common for older persons to

complain about feeling forgotten by friends and family members. In some cases, loneliness occurs because older persons do not receive regular visits and have no one to talk to after younger members of the family relocate to urban areas in search of jobs. In other cases, older persons are left alone because of their choice to remain in their traditional homes or villages for a variety of reasons<sup>23,24</sup>.

It is worth noting that when some people age, they become more disadvantaged, mostly if they do not have societal support systems to avoid having them in isolation, and most often they lead lives defined by desolation. The last years of life are often characterised by the inability of the elderly to work for themselves even where they face economic hardships. The governments do offer monetary assistance in form of old age pensions in some countries such as Botswana. Notably, in majority of cases where assistance is extended is not enough because of costly health demands at old age. It is owing to this situation that the elderly should be catered for adequately with countries targeting most deserving cases. The indiscriminate provision of assistance does in majority of cases benefit the people who do not need to be assisted, such as former state presidents, high courts and court of appeal judges, such as in the case of Botswana that has old age pension.

The need to design some legislative framework in order to protect the elderly population in African countries is pivotal, and it should be achieved with the full involvement of the universities in the continent. In Russia for instance, Aizinova<sup>25</sup> pointed out that there is an urgent need to develop a special mechanism to solve the financial, organizational, and legislative problems of ensuring a decent quality of life for the elderly based on the specific needs of different age groups of the elderly population. The design of the special mechanism is necessary in ascertaining that the African countries receive germane guidance in crafting policies and laws that prioritise the needs of the elderly.

The elderly population in the African continent is still cared for by the communities because of the traditional arrangements, then by formal institutions such as old age homes. As stated by Cohen and Menken<sup>26</sup>:

Economic security, health and disability, and living conditions in old age are policy concerns throughout the world, but the nature of the problem differs considerably from continent to continent and between and within countries. In sub-Saharan Africa older people make up a relatively small fraction of the total population, and traditionally their main source of support has been the household and family, supplemented in many cases by other informal mechanisms, such as kinship networks and mutual aid societies.

The elderly, even those who are supposed to be in hospices are often taken care off by their relatives in their homes, and in majority of the cases those people who care for them do not have prerequisite skills to provide them with dignified ending. It is therefore important to generate knowledge through research in gerontology, in order to guide those who provide care to the elderly in their later lives. The Africans do have their superstitious beliefs that should be studied so as to have better understanding of how they lead their lives during their last moments before their deaths. Most African communities hold certain beliefs in the ancestral connections that influence how the living conduct themselves. As noted by Onyedinma (undated):

In the African contexts the better understanding of the cult of ancestors in African communities, a brief insight into the concept of death and burial rites is deemed necessary. Death, although a dreaded event, is perceived as the beginning of a person's deeper relationship with all of creation, the complementing of life and the beginning of the communication between the visible and the invisible worlds. The goal of life is to become an ancestor after death.

It is the understanding of the importance of building a relationship with the ancestors that pre-occupy the elderly in some African communities in most cases, when they feel that their demise is approaching. This arrangement constitutes indigenous knowledge that requires to be studied formally with the aim of beefing up African literature on death and ancestry. The studies should provide important knowledge for social gerontology. The influences that the connection of the living to the ancestors should not be undermined, as it forms the cardinal position that some Africans hold in high regard as their social beliefs. Such beliefs influence their behaviour and cannot therefore be disregarded, if African institutions are to become more contextually relevant and responsive to the needs of the communities in which they operate.

#### 4. Economic Facets of Aging

The elderly population requires resources to survive, which often results in them constituting the workforce of most global economies. The African countries do have elderly populations in the continent, which face economic challenges that due to limited resources and inequalities are not addressed. The levels of poverty in the continent does in some instances make aging miserable experience, as the elderly do without sufficient resources when already having reached the stages of their lives when they can no longer adequately fend for themselves. As noted by Trong, Dong and Thi Ly<sup>27</sup> Advancing age often coincides with a decline in work capacity and income. As such, the aging population tends to reduce both labor force participation rates and the income streams of workers, heightening the risk of an economic growth slowdown. The other points that are worth noting are that, daughters and sons of the elderly people often get burdened economically because they are pressured to take care of their parents in most African communities. Where the children fail to execute the expected responsibilities towards their parents, they get humiliated within their communities as they are often labelled failures who deserve to be cursed by their ancestors. On the other hand, the elderly also in some cases get burdened with responsibilities of taking care of their grandchildren who they get left with by their children who gravitate to the urban centres for formal and informal jobs or any other reasons. As noted by Saxena and Brotherson<sup>28</sup> Millions of family relatives, particularly grandparents, become "parents the second time around" when parents experience difficulties and children need care. Grandparents in this situation need answers regarding concerns they may face, insight into feelings and experiences in their role as parent to a grandchild, and support in finding sources of strength for themselves and the grandchildren in their care.

The need for more provisions designed to have the elderly lead fulfilled lives requires due attention, mostly in Africa that is characterised by abject poverty, which led Kates and Dasgupta to state that, the percentage of extremely poor fell from 40% to 18%. However, in sub-Saharan Africa, the numbers almost

doubled from 168 million to 298 million. The level of poverty in Africa requires that African universities should play more active role in finding the best strategies that can economically empower the elderly, who in majority of instances are economically taken advantage of, such as where their grandchildren are left under their care.

The branch of economic gerontology is very important in making sure that the elderly get catered for sufficiently during their retirement ages. According to Dobanio-Sanz, et al<sup>29</sup> poverty permeates all spheres of low-income older adults' lives. Living in poverty impedes older adults' ability to meet their basic needs with many having to give up their social life or even beg on the street to survive. It is important to note that elderly people without resources at their disposal often face economic hardships that in some cases result in them facing depression at the time when they should be enjoying the end of their lives. Some countries can afford to make provisions for the elderly, such as old age pensions that are rolled out to them when they reach a particular age, which may put a strain on the economies. According to Borji<sup>30</sup> nations with larger older populations depend on a smaller group of people to pay for higher health costs, pension benefits, and other publicly funded programs. It has to be noted that the African continent has a youthful population compared to Europe but due to poverty levels in the continent, it does not take care of its elders adequately in some cases. According to Borji<sup>30</sup> most of the world's youngest populations are found in Africa, which is the poorest.

The institutions in Africa should provide the necessary knowledge that can lead to the elderly receiving the necessary training in the use of their resources and what to invest on when still able bodied. It is important to note that not all elderly people who face economic hardships have not had opportunities from which they could have saved resources for use later in their lives.

The African institutions should also assist governments in the distribution of resources, with the aim of channelling them to provide for their elderly populations. It is evidently indicated by Nabalamba and Chikoko<sup>31</sup> that, the management of long-term chronic conditions and related disabilities requires a considerable number of resources - both human and financial - from governments, communities, and families. Yet in much of Africa, governments still spend far less per capita on healthcare in general, let alone on social protection. As observed by Case<sup>32</sup> the situation of the older people is worsened by lack of economic security, access to health and human services, adequate housing and personal safety. Even in situations where the elderly make some savings when still able bodied and younger, they are most often prone to fraud incidences than other sectors of the population. Due to their vulnerability the elderly populations in the African continent need to be protected against fraud incidences by their respective countries and regional bodies. The caregivers and family members should be trained on how to offer them required protection against schemers and related criminals. This requires the universities in Africa to take the responsibility of designing apt programmes that can address the challenges to prevent the loss of monetary resources by the elderly.

It is disturbing to learn that worldwide people aged 60 years and over lost a combined 3, 4\$ billion to fraud in 2023 alone. We all need to work together to make sure our seniors, their caregivers, families, and friends know the signs to look for that a criminal is after their money, said FBI Criminal Investigative

Division Assistant Director Michael Nordwall as cited by Johnston<sup>33</sup>. In view of the atrociousness of this challenge, it is pertinent that germane action be taken to enhance the security of resources that belong to the senior citizens.

## 5. Gerontology and Adult Education

The training of adults on any field or subject requires some thorough understanding of what happens to their motivation and how their experiences can add value or impede their learning. As observed by Jegede<sup>34</sup> indices of psychological ageing include feelings, motivation, memory, emotions, experiences and self-identity. It is clear that when people grow old their concern gets centred on learning what can be of use to them immediately, which may be due to the limited time that they feel is left for them to live. It is owing to this understanding that they should be allowed to have massive influence in designing that which they wish to be taught. The disregard for the input of adult learners undermines self-directed learning, which is a concept in adult education that should influence what and how they learn. As stated by Szalay<sup>35</sup>, adult educators rarely design learning situations where the approach is systematically used in practice. The experiences indicate that self-directed learning has been a concept present in theory, discussions, and exchange of views, but seldom systematically put to practice in adult education. The aforementioned limitation that is advanced about adult education should be given due attention because as noted by Olajide and Ayantunji<sup>8</sup>, adult education could be used in reducing the challenges faced by the elderly people by providing them with appropriate programmes of guidance and also proper counselling that will help in adjusting and assisting them to cope with the declining functions of the organs of the bodies and contribute meaningfully to improve their communities.

On the other hand, as indicated by Cole and Ray<sup>36</sup>, mainstream gerontology - with its highly technical and instrumental, avowedly objective, value neutral and specialised discourses - lacks an appropriate language for addressing the basic moral and spiritual issues of our ageing society... and the fundamental questions of human existence... (around) what it means to be old. It is clear that both gerontology and adult education have areas that require more research because of the complexities. For instance, Sasser and Moody<sup>37</sup> notes that Human aging is a complex, multi-faceted experience that unfolds over an entire lifetime. While human aging is universal, it is also wildly variable, shaped by individual, social, cultural, political, geographic and historical contexts. On the other hand, adult education takes on the complex and multi-faceted questions, issues and problems of adult aging and old age.

It is important to note that if adult learners are to meaningfully participate and massively benefit from programmes that are offered by the institutions in Africa, gerontology should be utilised in the provision of theories that can be actualised to benefit directly and indirectly the adult education field. The provision of knowledge and skills through programmes should take into account the physical and biological challenges that adults normally face, and most importantly their mobility. If adult learners are to benefit immensely from adult education programmes, it is pivotal to consider the suitability of locations where they meet for their training. As observed by Maresova, Krejcar, Maskuriy, et al<sup>38</sup> mobility is crucial for active ageing as it allows older adults to maintain their independence, participate in physical activities, and engage in social and community life

as well as in accessing the necessary resources. The ability to move around freely, safely, and independently is essential for promoting physical and mental well-being, preventing falls and injuries, and reducing the risk of disability and institutionalization. The elderly in some instances do leave the programmes designed for them and not with them, protesting lack of their active participation. They do also withdraw from the programmes because the venues for such programmes are not designed with the understanding that adult learners do face physical challenges.

Interestingly, under gerontology a relatively new concept of cultural gerontology, which its main purpose is to emphasise the importance of culture in conceptualisation of knowledge has emerged. Twigg and Martin indicates that, Cultural gerontology has emerged in the last decade as one of the most lively and insightful areas of academic analysis. Drawing together works across the humanities and social sciences, it has changed the ways in which we study later years, challenging old stereotypes and bringing new theories into existence. It is the emergence of the new theories that should help the researchers in the identification of gaps that require due attention. It is also interesting that in the emergence of theories they are those that are incompatible. As noted by Libertini Rengo and Ferrara<sup>39</sup> for the first (‘old paradigm’), aging is the result of degenerative phenomena that natural selection cannot counteract completely, due to insufficient strength or opposing selection pressures. For the second (‘new paradigm’), aging is favoured by natural selection in terms of supra-individual selection: it belongs to a broader category of phenomena, on the whole defined as ‘phenoptosis’, which are explicable only in terms of supra-individual selection.

The same authors go on to state that for the new paradigm, aging is a specific function that is genetically determined and regulated, with its own physiology, pathology and phylogeny. On the other hand, writers such as Colman<sup>40</sup> notes that while there are several adult learning theories today (like andragogy, transformational learning, and experiential learning), they all aim to help educators better understand how to facilitate adult learning processes and design a company training program that achieves better outcomes. It is important to indicate that gerontology and adult learning are critical in making sure that adults learn better and age gracefully at the same time, which is empowering. As observed by Hachem and Manninen, (2020) empowerment translates into gains in identity and social capital, operationalized in the variable’s agency and social and civic participation, respectively.

The education of adults is without doubt going to become more demanding due to the increase in people who are going to live longer. The longevity of the people will put pressure on the countries for more resources to meet the exigencies of the adult populations, including in Africa where there is resource scarcity partly due to corruption of governments. According to World Health Organisation<sup>41</sup> by 2030, 1 in 6 people in the world will be aged 60 years or over. At this time the share of the population aged 60 years and over will increase from 1 billion in 2020 to 1.4 billion. By 2050, the world’s population of people aged 60 years and older will double (2.1 billion). The number of persons aged 80 years or older is expected to triple between 2020 and 2050 to reach 426 million.

The requirements for the provision of adult education

programmes is bound to increase to get the elderly to cope with the changes that are taking place in the world, which include getting them to live healthy lives. As observed by Zhang et al<sup>42</sup> it is extremely important to promote active aging and enhance health literacy. These involves full consideration of the need for education and the provision of solutions to problems associated with aging. It is therefore important for adult education and gerontology to stimulate the changes that are necessary for the benefit the elderly. As noted by Formosa<sup>43</sup> older adult learning has entrenched itself in mainstream academia and public policy, so that educational programmes for older adults represent a truly forceful global movement. It is important to recognise the need for Africa to take advantage of the existence of the motivation for countries to invest in the training of the elderly than it is currently the case. It is noted by Samei-Sis, Nadrian and Zeinalhajlou<sup>44</sup> that, in 2018 illiteracy rates among 65+ years people in Sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, landlocked developing countries, and Northern Africa and Western Asia were about 63%, 57%, 51%, and 47%, respectively. Also, using paper-based banking systems for these populations results in problems and difficulties for them, which threatens the seniors' independency due to their need for help while using the systems.

The level of investment in the education of adults through programmes that are housed in the African universities need to increase or be introduced, which will translate into more programmes on gerontology and related fields getting more designed for the benefit of the elderly themselves and the practitioners who work closely with them. The African continent cannot afford to undermine the important contributions that the elderly make when conducive environments are created for them to fully function. As noted by USC Leonard Davis<sup>44</sup> every industry, workplace and community needs leaders who understand the intricacies of aging processes and can navigate the path forward. It is important to note that the need to uplift the knowledge of leaders about the elderly should be prioritised by African countries. This calls for universities in the continent to play a pivotal role of generating knowledge for the field of gerontology that can be channelled to the consumers through adult education.

## 6. Conclusion

The problems that are faced by the elderly or senior citizens are varied and require interventions from most fields. The field of gerontology stands out to be of particular interest in studying the elderly and providing solutions that can help them live better. The field has demonstrated that the gaps do exist that require more research to be undertaken by universities in the African continent, so that they can be better placed to respond to challenges that besiege the elderly. The challenges that are of economic, political, social and psychological nature require countries to embark on the formulation of policies that are well informed through research findings. It is clear that the African governments do not invest on the elderly as is the case in Europe, Australia and America. It is therefore essential that adequate resources be channelled to the institutions such as the universities, so that they can be capacitated enough to conduct researches in order to generate more knowledge that can make practitioners in gerontology well guided when designing interventions that benefit the elderly.

The universities were also viewed as less responsive to the exigencies and should be capacitated to embark on the design

of programmes that can equip the practitioners, caregivers, researchers with knowledge on gerontology. The provision of knowledge, skills and attitudes to the elderly does enhance the quality of their lives, which necessitates adult education as suitable because it provides appropriate theories that when actualised can enhance the training of the elderly. Adult Education does provide germane approaches that when utilised can benefit the elderly in their respective communities, where in most instances are neglected, demonised and their challenges attenuated. The investment in the field of gerontology cannot be under estimated as more people due to advanced western medicine live longer than ever before, even in the African continent. The impressive levels of longevity require practitioners to function from an informed position so that the elderly can age gracefully. This paper has demonstrated that gerontology is very important because the elderly people are becoming exposed to different challenges that are economic, political, technological and social. The challenges require interventions that are based on research findings from African institutions. The African institutions do not offer programmes in gerontology, which can benefit the elderly themselves and the practitioners that function in areas of gerontology and adult education.

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