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FLEXIBILISATION OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SHIFTING TEMPORALITIES IN NIGERIA AND GERMANY

ABSTRACT

In his theory of acceleration, Rosa (2013) describes how modern societies have recently been going through a severe change in temporalities. This new dynamic confronts providers in Adult Learning and Education (ALE) with the challenge to not only adapt to shifting temporalities regarding their own processes and structures but also to support learners in adapting to a new 'pace of life'. One way of reacting to social acceleration can be considered flexibilisation. In our contribution, we compare ALE in Nigeria and Germany to investigate how social acceleration takes effect in both societies, what challenges result for ALE and how ALE providers react in terms of flexibilisation. By examining policy papers, recent empirical studies and data reports, we can show how shifts in temporalities cause similar challenges in both countries and that they appear as a driver for the flexibilisation of ALE.

Keywords: *adult learning and education, time, temporalities, acceleration, flexibilisation, Nigeria, Germany*

FLEKSIBILIZACIJA UČENJA IN IZOBRAŽEVANJA ODRASLIH V KONTEKSTU SPREMINJAJOČIH SE ČASOVNOSTI V NIGERIJI IN NEMČIJI – POVZETEK

Rosa (2013) v svoji teoriji pospeševanja obravnava velike spremembe časovnosti, s katerimi se v zadnjem obdobju soočajo sodobne družbe. Ta nova dinamika ponudnikom na področju izobraževanja in učenja

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odraslih zastavlja ne le izziv prilagajanja spreminjajoči se časovnosti z vidika lastnih procesov in struktur, ampak tudi pri ponujanju podpore udeležencem izobraževanj, ki se prilagajajo novemu življenjskemu ritmu. Enega od načinov odzivanja na družbeno pospeševanje najdemo v fleksibilizaciji. V našem prispevku primerjamo učenje in izobraževanje odraslih v Nigeriji in Nemčiji, da bi ob tem raziskali družbeno pospeševanje v obeh družbah, katere izzive prinaša za učenje in izobraževanje odraslih ter kako se ponudniki izobraževanj odzivajo v smislu fleksibilizacije. S proučevanjem dokumentov o politiki izobraževanja odraslih, novejših empiričnih študij in podatkovnih poročil pokažemo, kako premiki časovnosti ustvarjajo podobne izzive v obeh državah ter se pojavljajo kot vzvod za fleksibilizacijo učenja in izobraževanja odraslih.

Ključne besede: *učenje in izobraževanje odraslih, čas, časovnosti, pospeševanje, fleksibilizacija, Nigerija, Nemčija*

TIME, ACCELERATION AND FLEXIBILISATION IN ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION

Time is of great importance in our experiences of everyday life in modern society, and one could even state that modernity itself is defined by a specific temporality (Koselleck, 2004). Education and learning have become crucial aspects for modernisation and the rise of a highly dynamic knowledge society, which has led to the overarching, global and deeply anchored programme of lifelong learning. However, there is still a lack of attention in adult learning and education (ALE) research regarding the interrelations between modalities critical for modernisation (e.g. our world as global acceleration society) and their effects on the system of ALE, its providers and educational programmes (e.g. quick adaption and on-demand reactions). In our contribution, we apply a comparative research approach to investigate one specific relation between modern temporalities and educational practices, namely between acceleration and flexibilisation. Comparing ALE in Nigeria and Germany, we ask: *How does social acceleration take effect in both societies, what challenges result for ALE, and how do ALE providers relate to these changes in terms of flexibilisation*?

As time is of symbolic significance (Elias, 1988, p. xxv), social or individual phenomena can be characterised by temporal attributes. In our society of acceleration, the "slow ones" are considered those who have been "socially left behind" (Nowotny, 1996, p. 34). The Western school system is ordered around curricula, classes that are divided by age, and uses *chronological* time standards to evaluate learning progress. Education as a moral authority strives to create modern time-utilisation ethics (Göhlich & Zirfas, 2007, p. 108). The goal is to achieve future-oriented thinking and benefit-oriented actions with time as a limited resource through the habituation of time, an understanding of flexibility and an appropriate utilisation of time.

As the modern idea of time emphasises the necessity for ongoing transformation (Schäffter, 2001), flexibility and overarching change, the concept of lifelong learning can be seen as a manifestation of the temporalisation of modern society. Learning as the

adoption of infinite transformation (Schmidt-Lauff, 2012, p. 38) is triggered by the political idea of lifelong learning in continuity (Bélanger & Federighi, 2000), which implies a steady progression into 'the future' as the horizon. The agenda of lifelong learning follows the idea of acceleration and the inherent transformation metaphor as a central formula of legitimation. Dörpinghaus and Uphoff (2012) have criticised many references to lifelong learning as *self-institutionalisation*. Learning for a flexible, autonomous and balanced life is reduced to learning as an act of alienated, accelerated adaptation. Thus, the question remains whether lifelong learning is the solution or the problem – or whether it creates contradictory relations. To argue this question, it is helpful to get a more differentiated understanding of social acceleration.

In his attempt to deliver a phenomenology of social acceleration, Rosa (2013) has described three dimensions or forms of appearance. The first one is *technical acceleration*: not only has the transport of people, things and information sped up but so has the production of material and immaterial goods by technological innovations. In a historical perspective, the steam engine and the train, the assembly line and the car, the microprocessor and the Internet are markers of this process. Second, Rosa has noted the *acceleration of social change and an increase of contingencies*, which he has connected to the idea of a 'shrinking of the present' in the modernisation process. In modern society, the past becomes outdated more quickly, while the future becomes increasingly unpredictable, which leaves a very narrow time frame for a present where we can safely rely on our past experiences for our future decisions. Rosa has observed empirical evidence on the acceleration of social change (e.g. alterations in the structures of the family and intergenerational relations) in the dynamic of the so-called 'obsolescence of knowledge', in the change of career structures and the de-standardisation of the life course. Third, Rosa has described the *acceleration in the pace of lif*e. On the one hand, there has been an objective increase in the number of experience episodes per unit of time, which can empirically be shown by quantitative time budget studies. On the other hand – and much more challenging to investigate empirically – has been the subjective impression of time pressure and of time 'flying by'. This phenomenon has been traced by Rosa to two reasons taking effect simultaneously: the fear of missing out and the pressure to adapt. The claim for social and cultural participation thus produces a higher time pressure.

These analytically separated aspects of social acceleration are tightly interwoven in social practice, while at the same time, the relative strength of their effects on different societal sub-systems, fields and actors may vary empirically. In our paper, we will focus on 'flexibilisation' as one answer to the challenges described. According to Bateson, flexibility can be understood as an "uncommitted potential for change" (2007, p. 497). This definition points to the relation of flexibilisation and acceleration as it stresses that flexibilisation describes a form of strategies in coping with fast-paced changes in technology, society and personal life by striving for adaptativeness to new and unpredictable circumstances. Flexible employment forms allow enterprises to adapt to changes in demand, flexible working hours allow employees to adapt to changes in their personal

circumstances, and so forth. Hence, if we assume that social acceleration significantly affects ALE, we have to examine flexibilisation as one core strategy in dealing with it. Of course, such an analytical concept has to be elaborated empirically, and thus we will try to carve out the basic logic of this connection by applying a comparative research approach, the specific challenges of which will be discussed in the next section.

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH ON ACCELERATION AND FLEXIBILISATION IN ALE

Investigating time aspects in ALE with a comparative research approach takes up two different traditions. On the one hand, comparative research is a rather new field in ALE (Reischmann & Bron, 2008) and has quickly developed to yield manifold insights over the past decades. On the other hand, 'time' is by no means new for comparative, educational research. "The importance of evolutionary time was emphasised in comparative research at the early stage of the development of comparative education research" (Jokila, Kallo, & Rinne, 2015, p. 18). Beginning with this early stage and continuing until today, there has been a strong tradition of comparative education that focuses "extensively on historical analysis as a way to understand factors influencing educational systems" (Jokila et al., 2015, p. 18).

In contrast to a historical approach to comparative research, time can also be examined as a topic of the comparison. This is particularly helpful where time is researched as a 'resource' and/or 'constraint' to ALE and especially when the research seeks a broad international comparison of time-related issues. This approach can rely on many objective measures related to time aspects for which increasingly more reliable data sources exist (e.g. hours spent on ALE activities per year, mean duration of courses or schedules of courses).

However, there is also a need for comparative approaches that try to understand the qualitative dimension of temporal aspects in ALE. By conceiving time both as a physical and social phenomenon, it is not merely an external condition for education but rather a medium and outcome of learning processes. The relation between time and ALE is much broader than a historical or chronometric comparison may show and much more complex than common chronological units of measurement imply. Only by respecting time as a basic category of social and hence educational practice can time-ambivalences (e.g. continuity versus contingent or social versus natural) and time-ambiguities (e.g. flexible, linear, acceleration or maturation) and their relevance for the lifelong educational system, ALE providers, programmes, professionals and adults come into view. Corresponding to how the spatial turn reshaped our perspectives on social reality, a temporal turn is needed.

To establish such a perspective on time-related aspects of ALE in a comparative research setting, a methodological approach is required that allows qualitative in-depth comparisons. Egetenmeyer (2012, p. 80) has proposed a model with four levels. First, one has to describe the cases to be compared standing side-by-side in the form of a "descriptive

juxtaposition". This step includes a focus on specific aspects relevant to the research question, but it is in the second step, the "analytical juxtaposition" where the crucial features of each case are worked out in more detail. The third step of "descriptive comparison" summarises commonalities and differences, which prepares the final step. By connecting the findings and relating them to further features of the cases, the "analytical comparison" asks why these commonalities and differences occur.

For the comparative question of the article at hand, we broadly follow the principles of this model. We restrict our comparative analysis of both countries to specific institutional contexts, namely the ALE centres of the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education (NMEC) in Nigeria and *Volkshochschulen* (VHS) in Germany as well-established, widespread and highly recognised providers. The juxtapositioning focuses on the following three main factors. First, we describe the institutional setting of ALE in the examined countries and the historical process of its institutionalisation as a basis. Second, we discuss if and to what extent both countries can be meaningfully described as 'accelerated societies' in accordance with Rosa's (2013) dimensions of social acceleration outlined above. Third, we detail more recent developments of the NMEC and VHS in order to analyse them as means of a *flexibilisation* by ALE providers. Policy papers, public statistics and data reports were used as data sources for this comparison. However, as this comparative analysis has to deal not only with two very different countries but also with complex time-related phenomena, we first include a fundamental examination on the concept of time in Nigeria and Germany.

TIME, ACCELERATION AND FLEXIBILISATION IN NIGERIA AND GERMANY

There are diverse perspectives from which the concept of time could be considered in Germany and Nigeria. Typically, we can distinguish a Western, linear perspective of modernity from a traditional, pre-colonial African perception of time that focuses on actuality and events (Babalola & Alokan, 2013). In social reality, we can find a large variety of combinations of these perspectives (Levine, 2006). For instance, Germans are described as very punctual (*pünktlich*) and schedule-oriented people (Schuman, 2014). Time is carefully managed, while calendars, schedules, timetables and agendas are respected to the letter, trains arrive and leave on time and projects are carefully scheduled. This is because German living and working follows structure in forms of laws, rules and procedures, which is reflected in all economic, political and social spheres ("Business etiquette", n.d.).

In contrast, Africans, including Nigerians, are believed to have an idea of time but are not very time-conscious or do not value time (Babalola & Alokan, 2013). This misconception birthed the notion of "African time", which according to Nnajiofor (2016), depicts Nigerians as having no sense of punctuality regarding appointments or schedules. While rejecting this name tag, Nnajiofor (2016) opined that the best description of this tardiness was to say Nigerians lacked time-discipline. He reasoned that Nigerians keep time in their own way, different from Western time categories, which meant that while they were

not consistent with adhering to time constraints or specific schedules, they were fully conscious that time elapsed. He supported this observation with the argument that among other reasons, the lack of basic amenities rendered people helpless in certain situations over which they had no control and was a contributory factor. He gave the example that it was not possible to know the schedule of mini-buses (*danfo*) by checking online, i.e., to know when they would arrive at a given bus stop because public transportation did not operate on a schedule. There was, however, the awareness of the negative implications of "African time" to which efforts were being made to sensitise people towards punctuality.

Nigeria

In this section, we present the history and institutional structure of ALE in Nigeria and the cases of flexibilisation in the context of NMEC.

History and institutional structure of ALE

In conformity with the Jomtien declaration of "Education For All", the Federal Government of Nigeria established the NMEC via Decree 17 of 1990 (NMEC & UNICEF, 2010). The Commission was established with the broad objective of developing policies and strategies aimed at eradicating illiteracy in Nigeria by monitoring and standardising the implementation of mass literacy delivery in Nigeria, networking with local and international stakeholders to actualise its vision, and striving to produce self-reliant neo-literates through skills acquisition and functional literacy programmes. The body creates awareness of the importance of literacy and non-formal education and solicits the cooperation of stakeholders in making all Nigerians literate. The Commission also develops literacy programmes for disadvantaged groups while collaborating with state and local governments (LGs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders in implementing literacy, non-formal, and continuing education programmes in Nigeria (NMEC, 2017). These programmes can generally be referred to as ALE in Nigeria.

To effectively carry out ALE in Nigeria, the NMEC has an institutional structure in which it operates under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Education (FME). The FME formulates policies on ALE, supervises the activities of the NMEC and provides funds to carry out its mandate. The FME mobilises funds to states and LGs to pay for ALE programmes, while also initiating cooperation dialogues with international donor agencies (NMEC, 2017).

The NMEC works directly with the zonal offices in the six geopolitical zones of the Federation, which serve as intermediaries between the national headquarters and the state agencies; it monitors and supervises the state agencies while having a parallel link to NGOs, vocational centres and direct beneficiaries in the states (Aderinoye, 1997; NMEC & UNICEF, 2010). State agency officials working in LGs reach out to the learners in the communities under their LGs, and the LGs then mobilise learners, recruit instructors, monitor classes, keep records, evaluate ALE programmes, provide materials on behalf of the state agencies, and pass progress reports to the state agencies for onward transmission
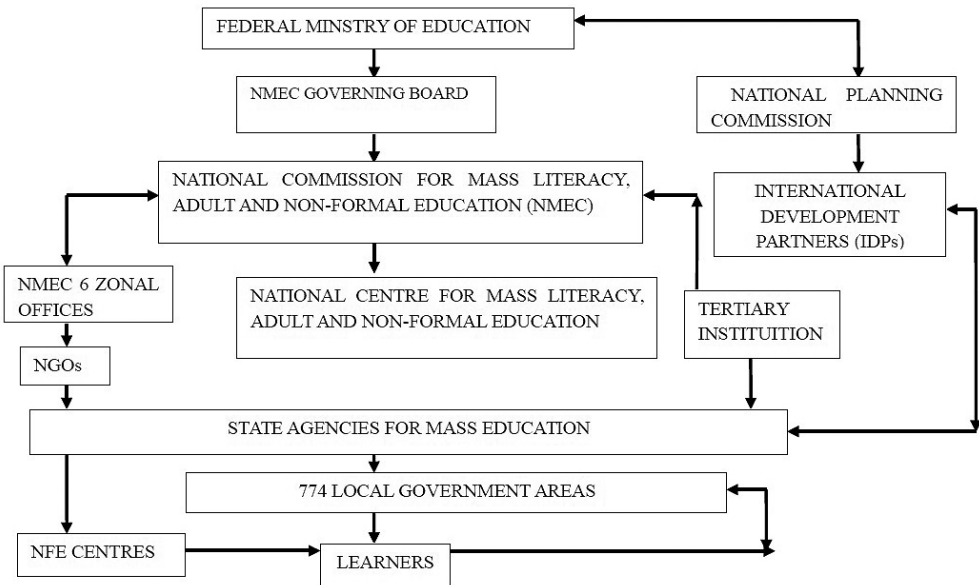
Figure 1: Institutional Structure of Mass Education in Nigeria (NMEC & UNICEF, 2010, p. 5).

to the zonal office (Aderinoye, 1997; NMEC & UNICEF, 2010). In the same vein, NGOs collaboratively work with the government to contribute to the promotion of ALE by embarking on sensitisations, providing data to the Commission and cooperating with international donor agencies for the promotion of ALE programmes (Aderinoye, 1997).

According to NMEC (2017), programmes operated by the Commission are structured to cover areas related to various forms of literacy education, continuing education and vocational education while focusing on an array of beneficiaries. These beneficiaries include adults who have never been to school or are above school age and cannot read, write and compute; those who left school before acquiring basic education due to various factors; persons who are already engaged in economic activities but require further learning to meet the needs of the ever-changing world of work; persons in need of rehabilitative education; vulnerable and constrained women; and adult nomads/migrants.

Recent developments and acceleration: Shifting temporalities?

In various global and local contexts, observable changes are occurring. We take 'recent' to cover mostly the first two decades of the 21st century. First, after a series of military interventions and consequent political instability, Nigeria established its fourth republic in 1999. Since then, Nigeria has been regarded as a *transitional democracy* with its attendant challenges (Mahmud, 2015). Second, in 2002, the democratic administration that had been inaugurated in 1999 resuscitated the open university. The National Open University of Nigeria primarily targeted individuals who wanted to *balance the temporal structures and tensions between work and learning*. This provided opportunity and accessibility for

various groups such as women, inmates and people in riverine areas (Temitayo, 2012). Third, the accelerated evolution of information and communication technology (ICT) has increased the consciousness and activities of globalisation in Nigeria. This growth is visible in the growing e-commerce industry, mobile phone users, internet penetration and social media subscribers (Agency Report, 2018; Orimobi, 2018). This *new temporal reality of interconnectivity* permeates all spheres of 21st-century daily life in Nigeria, including ALE.

Therefore, the 6th edition of the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2013) explicitly acknowledges "the tempo of development activities on-going in both global and local contexts" and that "fundamental changes in socio-economic and political structures wholly dictate the need for a change" (FRN, 2013, p. ii). The current ALE policy is thus informed by various global and local developmental frameworks. The latest policy document on ALE in Nigeria (NMEC, 2017) was informed, among others, by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the nation's commitment to "eliminating mass illiteracy within the shortest possible time" (NMEC, 2017, p. iv). The NMEC and UNICEF (2010, p. iii) had stated that "aggressively addressing" a few issues is necessary for "a rapid scaling up of literacy programmes" for youth and adults. In other words, shifting temporalities and the consequent demands and challenges have manifestly determined current strategies, including flexibilisation, for ALE in Nigeria.

Flexibilisation of ALE: NMEC programmes as an example

Nigeria presently deals with the issues of "physical access, quality access and economic access and equity" (NMEC & UNICEF, 2010, p. v). The NMEC (2008, pp. 66–68) reports that the issue of distance and time is a major contributor to non-participation in ALE in Nigeria due to the unplanned scheme of work, distance from learning centres and inappropriate timing of lessons. It is acknowledged that delivering various ALE programmes across Nigeria cannot be uniform, and there is a need for temporal-spatial flexibilisation. Thus, ALE in Nigeria is conceived "as learner centred, flexible, democratic, and functionally oriented and covering a broad spectrum of activities" (NMEC & UNICEF, 2010, p. v).

As explicated earlier, the structure obtainable in Nigeria allows for multi-level and multi-dimensional coordination of ALE. Linkages/collaboration and public-private partnership as a strategy for implementing ALE programmes have been renewed (NMEC, 2017). The strategic decentralisation-partnership pattern has impacted delivery in Nigeria's ALE programmes, and the NMEC and UNICEF (2010) claim that collaboration has led to the reaching of over 1 million learners and the establishment of at least 3 learning centres in all of the country's 774 LG areas. According to the NMEC (2017), flexibility will be encouraged in every component of ALE. Hence, the following paragraphs are a summary of how the NMEC currently provides ALE for four major components.

Basic Literacy is equivalent to Primary 1–3 of the formal system and lasts between 6–9 (or 9–12) months and a total of 78 contact hours, translating to about 2 hours per week. The

curriculum is flexible (e.g. process or sequences of content), and the duration/schedule depends "on time that is available to the learner". Modern learning approaches and materials can allow the programme to be completed in fewer months than expected (NMEC, 2017, p. 38).

Post Literacy has 12 subjects/courses (including Life Skills, Liberal Education, Women Education, Citizenship Education and Introduction to Computer Education), equivalent to Primary 4–6 of the formal system and lasts for 2–3 years. The curriculum is also as flexible in process and sequences of content as in basic literacy.

Continuing Education assumes the forms of remedial education, extramural studies and open and distance learning (ODL) in preparation for Junior School Certificate Examination, Secondary School Certificate Examination and professional examinations. It takes up to 12 or 24 months, with variations depending on the nature of the specific programme, weekly contact hours (NMEC, 2017, pp. 37–38) and individual learner's capacity.

Vocational Education may last up to 12-24 months or more, depending on the trade or craft and as jointly agreed upon between the organisers and the learners. It consists of 18 subjects based on the National Vocational Qualification Framework. This framework classifies and recognises prior learning "acquired by individuals, irrespective of where and how the training or skill was acquired" (FRN, 2013, p. 18).

Therefore, some strategies for flexibilising ALE programmes in Nigeria include flexible duration/schedules, the use of an equivalency system that enables adult learners to mainstream into the formal education system at different levels and recognition of prior learning. The diversity of the prospective learners is considered "in terms of need/aspiration for survival, participation, protection and development with emphasis on their characteristics, psychology and environmental differences" (NMEC, 2017, p. 29). This diversity presupposes that ALE centres across the country are not uniform regarding schedules, programmes and technology. For instance, Nomadic Education and Integrated Quranic Education (i.e., combined Islamic religious and basic education) are provided, targeting the northern Muslims (FRN, 2013; NMEC & UNICEF, 2010) as both a content and time flexibilisation strategy to ensure that people are not left behind because of their ethnoreligious characteristics.

Nigeria is committed to building a literate environment. One of the strategies for achieving this is the "establishment of mobile libraries, rural libraries, reading rooms, and varied places to settle for reading and writing" as well as "collaborating with ICT providers" (NMEC, 2017, p. 12). The NMEC (2017) admittedly recognises that ICT facilitates "continuous learning 'throughout their lifetime' because both traditional and new media break 'cost, time and space' barriers" (p. 72). Such facilities would be in every community (FRN, 2013, p. 20). In the UNESCO (2014) training manual for NMEC facilitators, ICT is regarded as "the order of the day" (p. 171). The acknowledgement of this shifting temporality has informed the inclusion of training on the use of some common tools and applications for literacy programmes. The use of ODL approaches for ALE in Nigeria is

well recognised (NMEC & UNICEF, 2010; FRN, 2013; NMEC, 2017). Meanwhile, the NMEC's deployment of ODL in Nigeria is still limited to the use of mass media, particularly for literacy programmes.

The Literacy by Radio programme is being employed to provide literacy and numeracy skills to adult learners in 21 indigenous languages and English (as of 2010) "in order to reach as many non-literate people as possible and make them literate within a short period" (NMEC & UNICEF, 2010, p. iv). The Cuban method has been adopted, which is a blended learning approach that consists of a radio listening session and a face-to-face session. As recommended by Olatunji, Otefisan and Ajayi (2017), blended learning enables the learner to effectively combine work, learning and living responsibilities. However, chief among the challenges of the radio initiative is that support from state and local governments is still low (NMEC & UNICEF, 2010). Another challenge, as admitted by UNESCO (2014), is that many Nigerians may not know about the Literacy by Radio programmes. A viable solution to this problem is effective mobilisation and orientation. An online presence via a functional and user-friendly website is also significantly necessary for the NMEC's organisations and current operations but is still missing.

Germany

In this section, we outline the development and institutional structure of ALE in Germany and then examine examples of flexibilisation practices in *Volkshochschulen* (VHS).

History and institutional structure of ALE

The institutionalisation of ALE in Germany had its first big developmental leap in the 19th century. With the growing importance of education in modern society, the education of adults was institutionalised in different social contexts and communities such as bourgeois clubs, workers' federations (and trade unions), churches and business companies (Olbrich, 2001). In contradiction to school or tertiary education, ALE in Germany today is far less regulated by the state and is still connected to its diverse institutional roots. There is a broad variety of ALE providers, while the state plays a more coordinating role following the principle of subsidiarity. Furthermore, adult education is legally regulated mainly at the level of the 16 federal states (*Bundesländer*). Even if ALE laws generally focus on how ALE should be promoted and which providers are eligible for public funding, this situation contributes to the very heterogeneous landscape of ALE in Germany (Nuissl, 2018).

Nonetheless, there are some institutions that have a long tradition and play an important role in today's landscape of ALE, with presumably the best-known being VHS. With precursors in the late 19th century, many VHS were founded after WW1 in 1918 and 1919, and still exist today (Nuissl, 2018). Presently, VHS are an omnipresent institution of ALE, with one in every larger municipality and in the more rural areas, where they may be spread out with multiple branches. As the last annual data report of VHS shows (Huntemann & Reichart, 2017, pp. 9–10), there are 899 VHS in total, with 594,000 courses, 6.6 million participations and 17.9 million hours taught. They employ about 4,000

pedagogical professionals who are responsible for the conception of the programmes, the organisation of courses and evaluations, while course instruction is mainly done by freelancers. In 2016, a total of 192,000 freelancers were teaching courses for VHS. Over half of the VHS have a municipality as the responsible body, one-third a registered association (*e.V.*), and some are organised as non-profit limited liability companies (*gGmbH*). Regardless of their legal form, their financing is usually a mix of three sources. In 2016, participation fees made up 37.9%, regular public funding constituted 36.5%, and funding from other sources (especially EU and federal funds) was 25.6%.

VHS traditionally offer a wide range of topics, from language courses to vocational education, and from basic education to yoga classes, that can be categorised in six programme areas. Table 1 shows the absolute number and relative proportion of courses, participants and hours taught for each of them in 2016. Health and language courses each made up about one-third of all courses and also of the participants. At the same time, over half of the hours taught at VHS in 2016 were in language courses, which had an above-average duration. This was also true for basic education courses leading to a formal degree, while the first three programme areas all showed below-average course durations.

Table 1: Programme areas of the VHS

Programme area	Courses	Hours taught	Participants
Politics, Society, Environment	36,748 (6.2%)	591,307 (3.3%)	516,926
Culture & Crafting	89,245 (15.0%)	1,555,373 (8.7%)	870,251
Health	197,394 (33.2%)	2,936,155 (16.4%)	2,336,793
Languages	202,14 (34.0%)	9,686,585 (54.1%)	2,303,676
Work & Occupation	51.237 (8.6%)	1,464,822 (8.2%)	427,007
Basic Edu. & Formal Qualification	17,566 (3.0%)	1,656,090 (9.3%)	150,588
Total	594.330	17.890.332	6.605.241

Source: Huntemann & Reichart, 2017, pp. 41–42.

Recent developments and acceleration: Shifting temporalities?

When we look for evidence on acceleration in Germany over the past two decades, we can first focus on technical acceleration, where the transport of people, goods and information has played an important role. The mobility of people in Germany can generally be considered high, and the latest mobility report shows an overall mobility rate of 85% (BMVI, 2018). While the number of journeys per person and day has stayed relatively stable since 2002, the time needed for them has slightly declined while the distance covered has increased (BMVI, 2018). Furthermore, the necessity for mobility has been diminished by a second development. E-commerce has developed tremendously over the past two decades, with sales rising from €1.1 to €53.6 billion between 1999 and 2018 (Handelsverband Deutschland, 2018), leading to a massive increase in goods sent. These developments

are tightly connected to the development of Internet usage in Germany. Between 1997 and 2017, the percentage of Internet users rose from 6.5% to 89.9%, and at least 72% are presently daily users (ARD & ZDF, 2017). Mobile Internet usage rose from 20% of Internet users to 68% of Internet users between 2011 and 2016 (Koch & Frees, 2016). This technological innovation alone has provoked a dramatic change in communication and interaction in both work and private life, including a temporal flexibilisation of these processes[1], which has contributed to a substantially altered perception and usage of time in everyday practices.

Second, accelerated social change and higher contingencies could be analysed as counterparts to processes of flexibilisation. In Germany, the labour market reforms at the beginning of the century aimed at an increased 'flexibility' for companies, employees and job-seekers. While the first should be enabled to adapt to changes in the markets more quickly with flexible forms of employment (e.g. subcontracted temporary employment), the latter had to develop more flexible career strategies and give up the idea of a lifelong occupation. This development not only fundamentally changed the labour market but also had a tremendous impact on lifelong learning (Dobischat, 2004). Even the current proliferation of right-wing populism and restorative positions throughout Europe could be discussed as symptoms of and reactions to a longing for security that is not threatened by migration but by the contingencies of late modernity.

Third, the increased pace of life is related to the fear of missing out and the pressure to adapt, which makes the connection to adult education obvious as it aims to facilitate cultural participation and social integration. Hence, we can recently see substantial discourse on and an intensified institutionalisation of educational guidance (Schiersmann & Remmele, 2004). The multitude of options for ALE makes it challenging to find the 'right' one. Yet, while ALE can be a way to address the need for quick adaptation and the fear of missing out, it also competes with an increasing number of alternative options of time use. This demands higher flexibility by ALE providers (e.g. time slots or course duration). Simultaneously, the challenge of coping with time became a prominent topic for ALE itself. Courses on time-management boomed after the 2000s, while in recent years, there has been a trend for courses on anti-stress, awareness and techniques of "deceleration" (Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung, 2014).

Flexibilisation of ALE: VHS as an example

Looking for the aspect of technical acceleration, we could raise the question of how VHS adapted to the importance of the Internet and web-based learning scenarios. Surprisingly, only in 2015 did the national association of VHS issue its ICT-strategy paper, "extended learning worlds" (Deutscher Volkshochschulverband, 2015). Though there was a use of web-based learning scenarios in many VHS before, this seems quite late for a common strategy, considering that a large market for web-based learning had already developed

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1   E.g. short-term mutual synchronisation of appointments via smartphone instead of long-term fixed appointments.

at that time. The focus on "extending" the existing learning world relates to VHS being a very well-established provider, with widespread offline "learning worlds". Combining local accessibility with online offerings can thus be seen as a strategy to react in a most flexible way to learners' demands.

From the perspective of a structural flexibilisation of the offerings, the growing importance of "Just-in-Time" and "On-Demand-Courses" stands out. This trend showed up for the first time at the turn of the century (Nahrstedt, Brinkmann, & Kadel, 1997). Today, many VHS offer potentially interesting courses that are then only carried out when a minimum number of learners register. In addition, VHS offer to arrange custom courses especially tailored to the needs of (especially organisations) clients. In 2016, these made up at least 9% of the total hours taught (Huntemann & Reichart, 2017, p. 21).

At the same time, a quick reaction to such demands has become more important as some VHS offer courses on demand within 72 hours. This just-in-time delivery of custom courses relies on the specific structure of the VHS, especially the large networks of freelancing teachers and also their extensive organisational and material capabilities. Yet the time organisation of courses remains quite stable. Weekly courses are still the most common form (58.6%), though their proportion is declining in favour of courses that take place more than once a week (Huntemann & Reichart, 2017). A division into two main forms of time organisation regarding the topic areas is emerging: courses with longer duration or more frequent classes, especially for language courses or integration courses; and shorter or one-time courses in political education (nearly 25% one-day events), vocational education (16% one-day events) and cultural education (12% weekend events). These are areas where ALE is orientated towards the needs of learners to reflect on current societal developments, to provide certain competencies or to follow personal learning interests, and the time organisation seems to address these needs with greater flexibility.

COMPARATIVE FINDINGS

The theory of acceleration turns out to be an insightful heuristic for the comparison between ALE in Nigeria and Germany. Although we are comparing two countries that may appear quite different in their history, culture, political system and economics, various indicators of shifting temporalities are observable in both countries, and we can find evidence on how they affect ALE. This observation led us to focus on flexibilisation as one specific form in which ALE may react (or better relate) to social acceleration. Even though we can show that flexibilisation surely plays an important role for both Nigerian and German ALE, it is the differences in its specific forms that demonstrate the value of a comparative research approach.

The use of ICT for learning by blending, embedding and extending offline and online learning worlds is a flexibilisation strategy obtainable in both countries, though to varying degrees and with different preferred media. For example, Literacy by Radio is of great importance in Nigeria. This may relate to the mentioned strategic decentralisation

partnerships that also have a large influence on ALE delivery. Both technical and organisational measures ensure that as many people as possible can be reached by the educational offers and that easy accessibility is realised. This achieves flexibilisation in the spatial and temporal dimensions as a programme such as Literacy by Radio enables people to learn literally *en passant*. In Germany, web-based learning plays an important role for VHS, especially in blended learning scenarios. As VHS already have widespread coverage and good accessibility because they are located in every larger community, ICT-related flexibilisation strategies seek to use this asset and combine it with the temporal flexibility gained by online learning, and more recently, with an online-network for VHS organisations, professionals and learners (cf. https://www.vhs.cloud/).

We can also find differences in the flexibilisation of the time-related organisation of courses. The phenomenon of just-in-time delivery and on-demand courses has not yet received attention in Nigeria, but the duration and schedules of programmes are usually determined (to a great extent) by the temporal tensions and capacities of individual learners. This dynamic could be related to differences in the perception of target groups. While the NMEC's target groups for its various programmes are formed by individuals, VHS also target organisations and institutional clients. Only on this basis is the fairly high rate of custom courses coming about. For individual learners, there is still a dominating time regime in the form of the weekly course, although we pointed out changes in the direction of shorter courses in specific topic areas in Germany.

These differences in the delivery strategies and organisation of courses strongly relate to the diverse contents of ALE and the overarching societal needs in both countries. In Nigeria, basic education is the biggest need of the people, and flexibilisation is important for providing the broadest accessibility due to the challenges of an accelerating society. In contrast, in German VHS, basic education is the least demanded topic area. In its differentiated education system, ALE with its many providers and course offerings tries to cover the increasingly diverse and varying individual learning interests in a "society of singularities" (Reckwitz, 2017). This intensified orientation towards individual demands instead of societal needs also has to be discussed critically as it is not a mere reaction but also contributes to the multiplication of possibilities of how to spend one's time and thus to an overall increase in the pace of life.

CONCLUSION

Currently, critical phenomena from the range of acceleration scenarios and flexibilisation described above are becoming a critical focus of pedagogic learning theories. Across dimensions, acceleration takes on a twofold function both as a model and a goal; objects, people, information, matter and life – and eventually thinking and learning – are accelerated (Göhlich & Zirfas, 2007, p. 116). Therefore, the answer to our question on whether the concept of Lifelong Learning is the *solution* or rather *part of the problem* of social acceleration, can't take the form of a simple 'yes' or 'no'. The concept of Lifelong

Learning remains highly ambivalent, even paradoxical, and creates sometimes contradictory relations. Our criticism focuses on the one-sided goal of lifelong learning by which learning is monopolised for accelerated progress in response to the dynamics of societies and social change (Rosa, 2013) worldwide and is understood merely as an indispensable investment in the future.

The accelerative dynamics specifically use the future to function as an unfinished draft requiring continuous, flexible relearning (lifelong and life-wide). The temporal phenomena of a perceived ever-shrinking present, dynamics and the pressure to change (e.g. by learning) are no longer limited to individual changes, to a one-after-the-other or to continuous reshaping. Rather, they encompass radical reconstruction and profound transformation. The ensuing destabilisation of both individual conditions of life and collective orientation principles – the challenge of discontinuous continuities – is also growing increasingly important for the practice of ALE.

On the other hand, the potential of the concept of Lifelong Learning is to underline the importance of strengthening collective structures (regulations, programmes such as NMEC in Nigeria, organisations such as VHS in Germany, etc.). These collective structures promote a socially accepted learning-time culture in which individual educational biographies can be perceived as a continuous identity negotiation between de-standardised life-courses (Rosa, 2013).

The flexibilisation of ALE was shown as a relational and ambivalent aspect of social acceleration opening up both opportunities and threads. It is the "rhythms of lifelong learning, between continuity and discontinuity", what we defined as flexibility and what Alhadeff-Jones describes as "a privileged resource to conceive the organization of the temporal complexity" (Alhadeff-Jones, 2017, p. 121). Thus, it can function as an instrument to cope with the challenges of recent temporal shifts and can contribute even more to social acceleration. Yet flexibilisation also has the potential to create different learning forms, spaces and especially times that could support temporal counter-movements of 'deceleration'. To investigate these possible effects, more research on how flexibilised forms of ALE affect the learning process of adults is urgently needed.

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