

## Illuminative Perspectives on Adult Learners' Participation in Literacy Education Programme in Edo South Senatorial District

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### **Abstract**

*The study examined adult learners' participation in literacy education programme in Edo south senatorial district and how such can lead to socio-economic transformation of the individual and consequently their environment. Four research questions were structured to give the study a focus. The study employed the descriptive survey research design. A sample of 400 respondents was used for the study. Simple random sampling procedure was employed. A 25 - Item questionnaire was used for data collection. The findings revealed that majority of the learners who enroll in adult literacy programme do not complete the programme, unfortunately, many of the participants often withdraw from the programme before the time for completion. The findings also revealed that inadequate finance, lack of motivation, awareness, family responsibilities and location of literacy centres are factors hindering adult participation in literacy education programme. It was recommended that learning centres should be strategically located within the senatorial district so as to encourage regular participation by all. Moreover, Government at the grass root level and senators within the senatorial district should see adult literacy programmes as essential to national development and accord recognition to it like the formal education system.*

**Key word:** Adult learners, participation, literacy education, socio – economic transformation

### **Introduction**

Literacy is significant to any meaningful human capital development and constitutes the basis for sustainable social and economic transformation. The acquisition of literacy is seen as a long-term process by which a community or a society seeks to effect its own cultural, social, economic and political transformation. Literacy education involves the acquisition of the skill of reading, writing and computing. This definition presents literacy education as involving three separate and distinct operations which together gives illiterates sufficient ability to have access to printed word.

The beginning of adult literacy education in Nigeria can be traced to the establishment of literacy classes for adults by the Missionaries. The introduction of Western education in Nigeria by the Christian Missionaries in 1842 led many people especially the adults to become literates in the act of reading, writing and numeracy in the newly introduced Roman alphabets and prints (Easton, 2005). The first mass literacy campaign was launched in 1946 by the colonial government. In March 1971, the Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) as noted by the National Commission for Mass literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (1997) was formed to foster the development of Adult Education

programmes. The council which was made up of adult educators and intellectuals from public and private agencies was largely instrumental to the establishment of an Adult Education section in the Federal Ministry of Education in 1974. The council ensured that the 1975/80 National Development plan in Nigeria had proposals on Adult Education. It thus facilitated the establishment of Adult Education and recommended a ten-year (1982-1992) Mass Literacy campaign for Nigeria. It was through this effort that the first National policy on education (1977) recognized Adult Education where mass literacy education was given priority.

According to UNESCO (2008), Literacy education programmes are more likely to be effective and sustaining adult literacy is seen as a priority of government at all levels. Literacy programmes should recognize and build on the skills, knowledge and life experiences that learners possess, gender-sensitive and respond to the needs and aspiration of all enrollees. Learners are encouraged and enabled to play an active role in their learning to read and write. State and civil society initiative complement each other so that even the poorest men and women in remote communities have the opportunity to learn, sufficient financial and human resources are allocated to programmes and there are complimentary efforts to enhance and develop literacy enhancement which includes posters, pamphlets, newspapers, books, electronic and broadcast media. In line with this, the Federal government has reinvigorated the activities of the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) and made policy dialogue and advocacy to mobilize stronger support and commitment to adult literacy for improved delivery of EFA goal in Nigeria. It is hoped that with such development, Edo state would be ready to wipe out illiteracy and experience socio-economic transformation.

The best way to motivate adult learners is simply to enhance their reasons for enrolling and decrease the barriers. Instructors must learn why the students enroll in the programme (the motivators) and discover what is keeping the trainee from learning. A successful and appropriate strategy includes Each-One-Teach-One or Each One Fund the Teaching of one, Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques (REFLECT), Literacy by Radio among others. Moreover, facilitator must show adult learners the relationship between training and an expected promotion and how the course can benefit the learners pragmatically, learners will perform better, and the benefits will be longer lasting. It is crucial for facilitators to be aware of the characteristics of their learners and they should develop lessons that address both the strengths and the needs of their individual students. It is when the needs of the learners are addressed, that is when they will be motivated to stay in the programme.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Nigeria has been involved in various educational activities aimed at increasing access to literacy education, in an attempt at reducing to the barest minimum, the level of illiteracy in the country. Those saddled with the responsibility of increasing access to literacy education, has actually been privy to some of the global interventions programmes through UNDP, UNESCO and UNICEF among others, to broaden access and improve quality of

education. Despite government's commitment to adult literacy education programme and recognition of its importance in national development, the programme is experiencing poor participation in Edo south senatorial district. This is further supported by the National Literacy Survey 2010, which put the literacy rate in Edo south senatorial district at 61.4% unlike Edo central senatorial district which is 70.1%.

Could it be that the strategies employed are not effective enough? This question and many others have not yet received enough attention from the research community in the country. An empirical study into assessment of the adequacy of access to literacy skills have not been conducted as far as existing literature is concerned particularly in Edo south senatorial district. The resultant strain is a dearth in empirical data which would have helped policy makers, planners and administrators develop efficient strategies for maximizing and consolidating the benefits of literacy programmes. This study therefore, attempts to examine adult learner's participation in literacy education programme and how such can lead to socio-economic transformation of the individual and consequently their environment.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the level of participation in adult literacy programme in Edo South Senatorial District?
2. What are the strategies employed in the mobilization of the adults to participate in the programme?
3. How are adult learners empowered economically through their participation in literacy education programme?
4. What are the social benefits the adult learners derived from their participation in Literacy Education programmes?
5. What are the problems confronting the learners in the programme?

### **Perspectives on Learners Participation in Literacy Education Programme**

Several studies have been conducted to examine the attrition rate and the problems hindering the efforts to eliminate illiteracy (Omoruyi, 1998). A major gap existing in our knowledge is the absence of studies on how adult literacy programmes work and the result they produce. The major questions that are left to be addressed include: What are the strategies employed in the mobilization of adults to participate in literacy programme? What is the level of participation of adults in literacy programme? What are the factors that hinder adult learners from completing literacy programme?

UNESCO (2005) noted that "Adults literacy programmes can produce more adult specific outcomes, such as political awareness, empowerment, critical reflection and community action which are not so much identified with formal schooling. The benefits of literacy can be conveniently, if arbitrarily classified as human, political, cultural, social and economic. The usefulness of literacy cannot be denied. The Neo-Literate, if properly instructed and made aware that literacy is a tool for liberation and enriched living, gains confidence and dignity.

The empowering potential of literacy can translate into political participation and thus contribute to the quality of public policies and to democracy. The relationship between education and political participation is well established. Educated people are to some extent more likely to vote and voice more tolerant attitudes and democratic values (Hannium & Buchmann, 2003).

The adult illiteracy rate has been steadily declining in all countries, particularly the past decades. Research has shown a close link between education and development. Education (Formal or Non-formal) is increasingly seen as instrument of empowerment. In line with this, EFA Monitoring Report (2008) indicated that adult literacy is intrinsically linked to the success of the other EFA goals. Adult literacy has been recognized to play a pivotal role in human development. The Fast Track Initiative (FTI) has to rediscover the essential contribution of adult literacy to become successful. Education has been seen as the foremost agent of empowerment. It is the bedrock of women empowerment. Access to literacy is considered one of the main factors for empowerment particularly empowerment of those excluded from formal system of education and development. Literacy provides access to written knowledge and, knowledge is power. In a nutshell, literacy empowers and transforms the participants.

Adult literacy education is a tool to educate the rural dwellers on best practices for environmental sustainability and good health practices, bring about equality and empower women, bring about job mobility and higher income thereby making them able to live above poverty line (Okukpon & Abey-Fashae, 2009). It is necessary in helping them out of superstitious beliefs, as many of such beliefs among rural dwellers are hinged on lack of awareness and knowledge. Adult literacy education is the key to helping the people achieve a range of capability and sustainable transformation.

Poverty level in Nigeria remains significant despite high economic growth. Nigeria has one of the world's highest economic growth rates (averaging 7.4%) over the last decade, and plenty of natural resources such as oil. However, Nigeria has a high level of poverty with 63% living below \$1 (one dollar) daily, implying a decline in equity (Wikipedia cited in Ojogwu & Oyitso, 2011). Poverty is pronounced deprivation in well-being and comprises many dimensions. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity (World Bank, 2005). Globalization creates wealth only for the elite who benefit from the surge of consolidation, technology and increased financial activities. Poor people will continue to live in poverty unless income inequality is addressed as a major global issue and greater equality is achieved.

## **Methodology**

The study employed the descriptive survey research design. According to Ali (1996), it is preferable to use descriptive survey research design when the subject of the investigation centres on individual's opinions, attitudes and perceptions.

The target population for this study is 4,379 which consisted of all adults who currently enrolled in adult literacy programme in Edo State; a sample of four hundred (400) Adult

learners was selected in some literacy centres. Simple random sampling procedure was used to select participants from 10 literacy centres in the seven (7) Local Government Areas that made up Edo South Senatorial District. The data for this study was obtained through the use of questionnaire. The items in the questionnaire were structured using four point Likert scale. It was validated by the lecturers in the Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education, University of Benin. Test - re test method was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. A correlation index of 0.75 was obtained. This shows that the instrument was reliable.

Descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency count, simple percentage, mean scores and standard deviation were used to analyze the data collected.

## Results

### Research Question 1

What is the level of participation in adult literacy programme in Edo South Senatorial District?

**Table 1: Level of Adult Learners' Participation in Literacy Education Programme.**

S/N	ITEMS	Mean	SD	Remark
1	The level of participation in literacy programme is very high	1.31	0.67	Low
2	The level of participation in literacy programme is high	1.24	0.54	Low
3	The level of participation in literacy programme is moderate	1.37	0.68	Low
4	The level of participation in literacy programme is low	3.36	0.49	High
5	The level of participation in literacy programme is very low	1.39	0.71	Low

Table 1 above indicates that majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the level of adult participation in literacy programme is low. This is as a result of the fact that the item has the highest mean score in the group and is above the cut-off point of 2.50.

### Research Question 2

What are the strategies employed in the mobilization of the adults to participate in the programme?

**Table 2: Strategies used in mobilizing Adults to participate in Literacy Programme**

S/N	Level of Response	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Reflect Approach	37	9.3
2	Each-One-Teach-One	19	4.7
3	Literacy by Radio	150	37.5
4	Learners Centred Approach	88	22.0
5	Use of Primer	106	26.5
	Total	400	100

Table 2 above shows that out of 400 respondents, 37 representing 9.3% mentioned reflect approach, 19 respondents representing 4.7% mentioned Each-one-teach-one. 106 respondents representing 26.5% mentioned literacy by radio, 88 respondents representing 22.0% mentioned learner centred approach while 150 respondents representing 37.5% mentioned the use of primer. The information above indicates that the respondents that mentioned literacy by radio top the list.

### Research Question 3

How are adult learners empowered economically through their participation in literacy education programme?

**Table 3: Economic Empowerment of Participants in Adult Literacy Programme.**

S/N	ITEMS	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Literacy programme increases ones income.	3.32	0.55	High
2	Literacy skills improve occupational skills.	1.38	0.69	Low
3	Literacy programme increases ones standard of living.	1.37	0.68	Low
4	Enrolment in literacy education increases ones productivity.	1.36	0.68	Low
5	Literacy skills guarantee employment opportunity.	1.36	0.68	Low

Table 3 above shows that majority of the respondents agreed that Literacy programme increases ones income. This is as a result of the fact that the item has the highest mean score in the group and is above the cut-off point of 2.50.

### Research Question 4

What are the social benefits the adult learners derived from their participation in Literacy Education programmes?

**Table 4: Social Benefits Adult Learners derived from Literacy Education Programme**

S/N	Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Literacy skills enable one to express him/herself in social gatherings	92	23.0
2	Through literacy education, learners now assist their children in school assignment.	109	27.3
3	Through literacy education, learners now involve in family planning programme.	76	19.0
4	Literacy skills enable one to write letters and understand local newspapers.	64	16.0
5	Through literacy education, participants now know the importance of balanced diet and hygiene	59	14.7
	Total	400	100

Table 4 above indicates that out of 400 respondents, 92 respondents representing 23.0% agreed that Literacy skills enable one to express him/herself in social gatherings. 109 respondents representing 27.3% agreed that through literacy education, learners now assist their children in their school assignment. 76 respondents representing 19.0% agreed that through literacy education, learners now involve in family planning programme. 64 respondents representing 16.0% agreed that literacy skills enable one to write letters and understand local newspapers. 59 respondents representing 14.7% agreed that through literacy education, participants now know the importance of balanced diet and hygiene. The information above indicates that the respondents that agreed that participation in literacy education programme enables learners to assist their children in their school assignments top the list.

### Research Question 5

What are the problems confronting the learners in the programme?

**Table 5: Problems confronting Adult Learners**

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Inadequate finance	3.32	0.55	High
2	Lack of motivation.	1.37	0.68	Low
3	Family responsibilities	1.35	0.68	Low
4	Lack of awareness	1.36	0.68	Low
5	Location of literacy centres	1.36	0.67	Low

Table 5 above shows that majority of the respondents are of the view that inadequate finance is the major problem confronting adult learners in the programme. This is further justified with the fact that it has the highest mean score in the group and is above the cut-off point of 2.50.

### Discussion of Findings

The result of the analysis of the opinion of the respondents about the level of adult participation in literacy education programme shows that majority of the respondents believed that the level of adult participation in literacy programme is low. This is in line with NMEC, yearly statistics which shows an average of 1.7million learners whereas Nigeria has over 44million learners being targeted. At this rate, it will take more than 22 years to achieve EFA goals in Nigeria (NMEC, 2008)

Concerning the strategies used in mobilizing adults to participate in the programme, most of the respondents agreed that literacy by radio was the best way to mobilize adult learners to participate in literacy education programme. This is in line with the survey which proved radio to be much preferred medium for learning basic literacy and more affordable to the target learners in our communities (NMEC, 2008).

In respect of economic empowerment, majority of the respondents agreed that literacy education programme increases one's income. This is due to the fact that every

other economic benefit revolves round this point. The result supports the view of Corridan (2002) and EFA Global Report (2006). On his part, Corridan observed that an increase in productivity leads to an increase in income and high standard of living is as a result of high income. In the same vein, EFA Global Report opined that education has been consistently shown to be a major determinant of individual income, alongside professional experience while the number of years of schooling remains the most frequently used variable.

The finding on social impact showed that the respondents agreed that participation in literacy education programme enables learners to assist their children in their school assignments. The finding reveals that the major problem confronting adult learners was inadequate finance. This finding collaborated with Owen (2000) in his work 'concept of situational barrier' which refers to an individual's life situation as well as the extent to which resources such as time or money influence participation.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined adult learners' participation in literacy education programme and how such participation had led to socio-economic transformation of the individual and consequently their environment. Literacy is an indispensable foundation and it leads to achievement of other rights. The citizens' educational status in any nation correlates with its level of development. The higher the level of the citizens' education, the more developed the nation. Education, be it formal or non-formal, is the corner stone of citizens' empowerment, it enables them to respond to opportunities and lead to transformation of lives.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made.

1. There is the need to expand learning programmes to all the nook and cranny of the senatorial district and government at the grass root level should established learning centres strategically located within the Senatorial District so as to encourage regular participation by all.
2. NGOs should be encouraged to support the creation of more centres for adult literacy and International donours should give enough time for the agencies to draw plans on how and what the intervention funds will be used for.
3. Involvement of opinion and community leaders as agent of sensitization need to be fully addressed, while recognition be given to the adult literacy certificate as a way of encouraging participation and discouraging withdrawal from the programmes.
4. Efforts should also be made by the organizers of literacy programmes to identify the needs of the learners at the beginning of literacy programmes so as to motivate the learners to achieve the desired skills.
5. The Agency of Adult and Non – Formal Education should encourage the use of literacy by radio because it allows the participants to learn at the comfort of their home and at their convenience.

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