

Literacy Skills as Effective Tools for Democracy and Good Governance: Beneficiaries' Views.

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Abstract

Literacy is a product of education. Education helps citizens to access and act on information, use their knowledge to comprehend and analyze information and act in a civil manner. This paper examines literacy skills as effective tools for democracy and good governance: Beneficiaries' views. One hundred and eighty eight (188) respondents from five literacy centres Benin City, Nigeria were sampled. A 29-item questionnaire constructed by the researchers was validated by three experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha statistics. The reliability co-efficient was established at 0.75. The items were concerned about the skills acquired in the centres for effective participation in democracy and good governance. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data collected. It was found that beneficiaries were of the view that skills acquired would help them to participate in democracy and good governance. It was recommended among others that government should show more interest in the education of adults to ensure that the MDG(2) goals of eradicating illiteracy was achieved.

Keywords: *Literacy Skills, Literacy Centres, Participation, Democracy and Good Governance.*

Introduction

Education entails the inculcation of values, ethics, skills and attitudes essentials for social development and growth of the individual and the society (Effiong, 2009). It helps citizens to access and act on information; use their knowledge to comprehend and analyze information and act in a civil manner. Therefore, literacy is a product of education.

Literacy has been defined in many ways, simply put it is the ability to read, write and numerate. This is the type of literacy provided by the colonial masters with the introduction of the 3Rs (reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic). This type of literacy is elementary and only gives the individual the basic means to participate in the society.

UNESCO (2010) defines literacy as:

“The ability of a person to function in all the activities
in which literacy is required for effective functioning

of his/her group and the community and also for enabling him/her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his/her own community development.”

This is the literacy that equips the individual to face the demands and rigours of everyday life and to acquire entrepreneurial skills. It is therefore, a tool for effective social and economic participation and contribution to human development and poverty reduction. Literacy deals with the acquisition of wisdom, desirable attitudes such as freedom to make choices, better grasp of real life and enhancement of personal dignity. It facilitates empowerment and gives access to accurate information, equips one with critical thinking abilities, necessary communicative skills to participate in democracy and good governance.

Good governance is an essential ingredient for economic and social resources. World Bank (2002) defines good governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. Without good governance, human right cannot be respected and protected in a sustainable manner. It is only a literate person that can monitor government activities to ensure that they conform with the tenets of good government.

The government is doing everything in fostering literacy. The 1999 constitution section 18:3 states that the government shall eradicate illiteracy and to this end, shall as when due practically provide free, compulsory and universal primary education and free adult literacy programme. One of the goals of primary education is the inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively (FGN, 2013).

Literacy is measured through youth literacy and adult literacy. National Literacy Survey (NLS) (2010) pointed out that the literacy rate in Nigeria is 61%. Olupohunda (2012) cautioned that Nigeria may not achieve the Millennium Development Goal (2) of eradicating illiteracy among adults and children population by 2015. He pointed out that many countries have renewed efforts to provide educational opportunities for school age children and adults not covered by the formal school system.

The federal government of Nigeria is committed to reducing illiteracy and meeting one of the goals of Education for All (2000) by ensuring that 50 percent of the adult population can read and write at least in one language by providing basic education. This is

because of the realization of the fact that individuals would lag behind in all spheres of development if not literate as non-literate person could not be mobilized for meaningful political and social development. Also, non-literate persons are often used as thugs, assassins and election riggers and are used and manipulated by the elites.

The commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education is responsible for organizing, monitoring and assessment of adult literacy. One of the objectives of National Literacy plan is to make four to five million adults and youth acquire basic literacy. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) is a concerted effort to ensure that school age children are in school. Akinbobade (2013) quoted the Minister of State for Education, Barr. Wike saying thirty five million adults are illiterates and that adult illiterates have increased from twenty five million in 1997 to thirty five million in 2013. He further said that over 10.5 million children out of 300 million school age children are out of school. In fact, Nigeria has the highest number of out of school children in the world. This therefore means that vigorous efforts should be made at revitalizing youth and adult literacy.

Olupohunda (2012) highlighted the fact that about 500,000 out of 40 million illiterates (which is equivalent to one out of 80 illiterates) are enrolled in adult learning centres. For these adults to participate fully in democratic process and make critical and knowledgeable choices, they need to be engaged in literacy activities. These would not only equip them in acquiring basic literacy (reading, writing and numeracy) but also acquiring entrepreneurial skills. The changing needs of the society especially, changes in the structure of employment bring about the need for the adult population to update their skills in order to cope with rapidly changing competitive work force and global economy.

Access to educational opportunities is necessary ingredient for positive change in the society. A serious problem of the adult illiterates is their lack of participation in politics. Political participation entails getting registered, being adequately sensitized on political parties and their manifestoes, voting at elections and belonging to political parties. Okpoko (2000) noted that an adult should be able to interpret and read political parties manifestoes, slogans and other issues that would make them to be sensitized on political issues concerning them.

According to the National Mass Education Commission (2011), adult literacy rate in Edo State was rated 45.8%. This high literacy rate has made it impossible for many non-

literate people to assess the extent to which elected officials have used the power delegated to them. When these adult illiterates are fully sensitized and educated at the basic level of literacy (reading and writing), they can vote wisely and this will eventually lead to their effective participation in democratic processes.

Acquiring literacy skills will help breakdown apathy and the culture of silence of the vast majority of Nigerians and empower them to participate effectively and meaningfully in the process of nation building. Election and voting are considered to be democratic instruments for people who are literate and politically conscious know the right thing to do.

It has been observed that many non-literate adults are not utilizing the services provided by the learning centres to improve their literacy skills. Traders, artisans, farmers and housewives lack the opportunity of participating in democracy and good governance. Literacy is a major avenue of enhancing the level of awareness of the citizenry with a view of reducing ignorance and poverty in the society. In the light of the above, this paper examines beneficiaries' views of literacy programmes in the acquisition of literacy skills.

For adults to be able to participate in governance, they require basic education and information. Daodu (2015) supported this assertion when he proposed that awareness and orientation are pre-requisite for good governance and political involvement. Noltin in Daodu(2015) is of the view that educating adults is changing people's attitude to achieve ethical awareness, skills and behaviour consistent with the goal of building more sustainable democracy. Therefore, skills acquired through education would equip them to participate in decision making.

Dauda (2007) pointed out the problem of the rural dwellers which is that they are often not enlightened to understand the prevailing democratic processes and this has made political elites and state actors to capitalize on their ignorance and poverty. This in effect has made the rural dwellers vulnerable to manipulations, marginalization and impoverishment.

Osuyi (2001) noted that education is the only means through which adults would be exposed to the nature and workings of the government and understand issues of politics, democracy and public affairs. Education in essence, equips them with the knowledge of their rights, duties, responsibilities and how to be relevant when political issues are discussed.

A lot has been said about gender disparity in education even with adult literacy programmes. This has been linked with the cultural belief of men superiority and female

subordination. Ojo (2002) confirmed this disparity and pointed out that more males than females are able to access education. Opaluwah and Fadeyi (2007) found that female underdevelopment, backwardness and intra-financial squabble are some of the reasons for gender disparity and enrolment in school.

Ajibade (2014) on his part painted a vivid picture of adult female population who are stark illiterates and those who participated in adult literacy programmes in North central, Nigeria between 2010-2012. Citing National Population Commission (2006) and National Literacy Survey (2010), he showed that there were about nine million, eight hundred and fifty eight thousand and seventy eight (9,858,078) adult females in North Central Nigeria and that four million, six hundred and fifty four thousand and thirteen (4,654,013) were stark illiterates who could neither read nor write in any language. Out of these illiterates only one hundred and twenty six thousand, four hundred and fifty six (2.6%) participated in adult literacy programmes between 2010-2012. This shows that the number of women who participated in formal basic literacy programmes is low despite efforts made by the different levels of government.

Linda and Johnson (1990) found that majority of the participants in literacy classes tend to be women but the retention rate is lower than that of men. Olomukoro (2012) in her study of women participation in literacy classes found that more women participated in these classes. She further pointed out that the women participated for cognitive reasons (personal recognition and fulfillment), which is an indication that the society is becoming more and more complex and technologically advance. These women have realized that any individual without basic education and skills will find it difficult to cope in a changing society like Nigeria.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1. Find out if the skills acquired would enhance beneficiaries' participation in democracy and good governance.
2. To find out if the beneficiaries' views of literacy skills differ as a result of gender.
3. To access the relevance of the literacy programme in the acquisition of literacy skills.
4. Find out if the skills acquired would enhance beneficiaries' participation in democracy and good governance.
5. To find out if the beneficiaries' views of literacy skills differ as a result of gender.

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

Research Questions

1. What are the beneficiaries' views of skills acquired in the literacy centres?
2. Will beneficiaries' view of the literacy skills acquired in the literacy centres differ as a result of gender?
3. Will beneficiaries' views of literacy skills acquired enhance their participation in democracy and good governance?

The following Hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance

Null Hypotheses

H₀₁. Beneficiaries' views of literacy skills will not significantly differ as a result of gender.

H₀₂. Beneficiaries' views of the literacy skills acquired will not significantly enhance their participation in democracy and good governance.

Methodology

This study is a survey. The population of this study was made up of all adult (male and female) enrolled in the literacy centres in Benin metropolis. Samples were selected using the simple random sampling technique. Five centres were randomly selected from the learning centres and from each school forty people were randomly selected. A total of two hundred (200) respondents were selected. However, only one hundred and eighty eight (188) respondents were used as they were the ones who completed the questionnaire that were administered.

A questionnaire titled "Learning Skills for Democracy and Good Governance (LSFDGG)" developed by the researchers was used to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire was made up of two parts (Sections A and B). Section A sought demographic information such as location of learning centre, age, sex and educational level.

Section B contained thirteen items that sought to find out if the participant believed that the skills they would acquire would be relevant to them and if the skills they would acquire would assist them to participate in democracy and good governance. A four point likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) weighted as 4, 3, 2 and 1 was used for data collection. The subjects were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with the items contained in section B of the instrument. To ensure

the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was given to three experts in the Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology. Their corrections were used in the final draft of the questionnaire. To determine the reliability of the instrument, thirty adults at a literacy centre not included in the study were administered the questionnaire. Their responses were subjected to Cronbach Alpha Statistics and a reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained and this showed that the instrument was reliable. The analysis of data was carried out using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (t-test).

Results

Research Question 1: *What are the beneficiaries' views of skills acquired in the literacy centres.*

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of beneficiaries' view of literacy skills

variable	N	Mean	SD	Test Mean
Literacy skills	188	45.39	5.16	32.5

Table 1 shows that the mean scores of 45.39 which is greater than the test mean of 32.5 which means that beneficiaries' views of literacy skills acquired in the literacy centres are relevant.

Null Hypothesis 1: *Beneficiaries' views of literacy skills will not significantly differ as a result of gender.*

Table 2: t-test of difference of beneficiaries' view on literacy skills

Sex	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig.(p-value)
Male	61	44.95	4.13	186	.805	.422
Female	127	45.59	5.59			

In comparing beneficiaries' views of literacy skills acquired based on gender, t-statistics revealed that there was no significant difference between the males and females. Since $p > 0.05$, the hypothesis which stated that beneficiaries' views of literacy skills will not significantly differ as a result of gender was retained.

Null Hypothesis 2: *Beneficiaries' views of literacy skills acquired will not significantly enhance their participation in democracy and good governance.*

Table 3: One sample t-test of significant difference of skills acquired in the participation of democracy and good governance

Variable	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig. (p-value)	
Participation in Democracy and Good Governance	187	37.80	4.89	182	21.58	.000

Table 3 revealed that p-value of .000 is less than the alpha value of 0.05 which shows that beneficiaries' view of literacy skills acquired is significant and can enhance their participation in democracy and good governance.

Discussion

The findings of this study showed that beneficiaries' views about the skills acquired in the literacy centres are relevant. They believed that these skills would help them in the participation of democracy and good governance. This agrees with the studies of Osuyi (2001), Noltin (2005) and Olupohunda (2012) who found that for adults to participate fully in democratic processes and make knowledge choices they need to be engaged in literacy activities. They all agreed that educating adults is changing people's attitude to achieve ethical awareness and skills required to effectively participate in democracy.

There was no significant difference in beneficiaries' views on literacy skills acquired based on gender. This finding however contradicts those of Ojo (2002) and Okeke (2010) who found variation in school enrolment of boys and girls. The researchers in the course of this study found more women than men in the literacy centres and they were very enthusiastic about the programme. This was also observed with the findings of Olomukoro (2012) and Tahir (2014).

It was found that beneficiaries are of the views that the skills acquired would enhance their participation in democracy and good governance. This finding is similar to the findings of Olupohunda (2012) and Okpoko (2000). The present study shows that adults in the literacy programmes are optimistic that the skills acquired would help to make them to be literate and would enable them acquire skills that would help them to participate actively in the society.

Conclusion

This paper examined beneficiaries' views on literacy skills as effective tool for democracy and good governance. It was found that beneficiaries are of the view that the skills

they would acquire from these centres are relevant. Gender did not significantly affect beneficiaries' views about the skills they would acquire from these literacy centres. It was also found that literacy skills acquired would enhance beneficiaries' participation in democracy and good governance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that:

1. The government at all level (local government, state and federal) should show more interest in adult and non-formal education by creating more awareness on the need for people to utilize the services provided in the literacy centres.
2. For the goals of Education for All (2000) to be met and to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (2) of eradicating illiteracy among adults and youths and ensuring that people can read and write at least in one language, efforts should be made to ensure that these literacy centres are working.
3. These centres should be well equipped to make the environment conducive for learning.
4. Regular inspection by the Ministry of Education should be carried out to ensure quality learning.
5. Facilitators in these centres should be trained and retrained to ensure they are effective in carrying out their tasks.
6. The government at all levels should encourage these adults by supporting them with stipends to set up their own outfit.

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