



## Impact of Adult Literacy Programmes on Economic Empowerment of Women in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explores the impact of adult literacy programmes on the economic empowerment of women in Nigeria. Equally, the paper dive into adult literacy and its contribution to society, self-esteem development, health, socio-cultural development of women and economic development of women. It also explains the relationship between adult literacy and women's empowerment. The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between adult literacy programmes and women's economic empowerment. The study concludes that adult literacy programmes have the potential to transform the lives of women in Nigeria by enhancing their economic empowerment. However, the success of these programmes depends on addressing the unique challenges faced by women, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. The study recommends a multi-faceted approach to promoting women's economic empowerment through adult literacy programmes, including increased funding, capacity building, community engagement, and technology integration.*

**Keywords:** *Adult literacy programmes, women's economic empowerment, Nigeria, vocational skills training, entrepreneurship education.*

### **Introduction**

Today's complex society is undergoing tremendous changes in all ramifications of human activity, as evidenced in the political, economic, occupation, social, cultural and technological sectors. Formal, non-formal and informal education is viewed as a tool and is thought to be the main force behind developments. In order to acquire information and skills through education or literacy, one must actively participate in development (Spiel et al., 2018).

There is no longer any question that the majority of adult illiterates worldwide are women. This opinion was supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's



(UNESCO 2006) Education for All global monitoring report, which found that two-thirds of the 771,000,000 adult illiterates worldwide today were women. The research also noted that a significant portion of the world's illiterate population lived in emerging nations; in fact, three-quarters of them were found in just 12 nations, including Nigeria (E. F. A. Global 2010).

With over 40,000,000 illiterates, 60% of whom were women, according to the country's national census, Nigeria ranks among the nations with more than half of the world's population, nearly half of its out-of-school children, and two thirds of its illiterate. This highlights the empowering role of literacy and its significance for development, which are acknowledged globally. According to the 2006 census, there were around 68,300,000 women in Nigeria, and two-thirds of them lacked literacy. Since poverty and illiteracy are known to be highly correlated, they must be empowered in all aspects of the developmental process, particularly in the socioeconomic one, in order to engage in it effectively and meaningfully. Most women, particularly those in rural areas, stink of poverty. According to these viewpoints, empowering women is essential to correcting the marginalization that illiteracy causes. For women to be empowered, they must have more access to higher education, chances for skill development, and positions of control. This is due to the fact that sustainable and harmonious development necessitates the involvement of every citizen of the country. Without equal rights and opportunities for women, sustainable growth will not be possible (Oyitso, 2006).

Nwosu and Nwofor (2024) emphasize that a nation cannot attain noteworthy progress if its women remain ignorant, disenfranchised, and excluded. Giving almost half of the population access to high-quality literacy will enhance their lives and means of subsistence and undoubtedly have a long-lasting social and economic impact on women. Throughout the year, women's contributions to the growth of the country have been hindered by their limited access to educational opportunities. More and more people are realizing that if half of humanity is still uninformed and marginalized, sustainable human development cannot succeed (Oyitso, 2006).

Somieari-Pepple (2023) some admirable policies and initiatives have been implemented in Nigeria in an effort to improve women's position and include them in important development-related concerns. The Nigerian government has implemented adult and non-formal education programs to increase women's educational engagement. These consist of mass literacy initiatives, women's education initiatives, non-governmental organization (NGO) initiatives, and private citizen initiatives.

To create a national policy on women and development, the National Commission for Women was founded in 1989. Every other initiative for women depends on this commission. After the Nigerian women's education design was ridiculed in 1986, state and federal ministries of education established women's education units for both urban and rural women who wanted to pursue higher education. The blueprint's overarching goal is to provide equal educational opportunities for women, regardless of their age, place of residence, socioeconomic standing, or creed. The national Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC), established in 1991 by the federal government with the goal of eliminating illiteracy in the nation, is another commission that advances women's interests, particularly in the area of education. Through the commission's programs, which include mass literacy workshops held around the nation, women are specifically targeted. The commission establishes agencies known as the Agency for Adult and Non-Formal Education in each state and the federation to reach every region of the nation (Cap & Act 2012).

However, Nigeria, one of the developing nations, ought to be interested in enhancing women's economic activities by creating, sustaining, and enhancing adult literacy programs for women's economic empowerment, considering the distressing effects of poverty on women (Karofi & Nsude, 2024).

### **Adult Literacy and its Contribution to Society**

The evolution of society is aided by adult education: Since the 1950s, adult education has been seen as an essential part of formal education. Because literacy benefits individuals, families, communities, and nations, it was argued to be a basic human need and right. Adult reading abilities are widely regarded in today's culture as being crucial for decision-making, personal empowerment, and active engagement in local and global and community affairs (Karanikola & Palaiologou, 2021).

Farooqi et al. (2023) explains, for example, how adult literacy improves people's mental health and promotes societal prosperity and economic growth. Additionally, Farah (2002) contends that adult literacy promotes improvements in development indices in a variety of domains, including health, prosperity rates, children's education, economic advancement, independence, and empowerment, and that it has a favorable impact on advancement, especially for women. These ideas led governments, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations to launch numerous adult education initiatives in underdeveloped countries.



## **Adult Literacy and its Contribution to Self-Esteem Development**

Adult literacy fosters the growth of self-esteem: A personal state that promotes social and political engagement is self-esteem. A person's increased self-confidence can result in early political activity; it acts as an invisible shield that gets people ready to engage in actions that could have unintended consequences but also present hazards. Personal qualities that allow one to feel that one may affect one's surroundings seem to be necessary for access to the public realm and decision-making. (Stromquist, 2008)

## **Adult Literacy and Its Contribution to Health**

Adult literacy improves the quality of life: Adult literacy can help people achieve a variety of goals, such as maintaining good health and living longer, managing reproductive behavior, raising and educating children, reducing child mortality, and improving prospects. The actual relationship between women's literacy and health metrics, including increased life expectancy, reduced fertility, and child mortality (Miller et al., 2011).

The effect of adult basic education in Nicaragua over a ten-years period and found that women who had taken part in the adult literacy program actually had a significant decrease in infant mortality. They also discovered that those who had received literacy instruction at the primary level had a more notable reduction in the mortality rate of children as a result of adult basic education than those who had not (Smith-Greenaway, 2013).

Regarding fertility, educated women interviewed for her study in Nigeria stated that they had used family planning techniques, compared to only 11% of uneducated women who stated that they had used some but not all of the family planning practices. Additionally, the survey discovered that 4% of women with education had children, compared to 7% of women with no education (Loney & Sheikh, 2018).

Research has shown that women who participate in adult literacy programs are better informed about matters pertaining to both themselves and their children. They can't wait to get their kids vaccinated or receive other treatments at the health station. Research on how adult literacy affects family planning also shows that women who participated in adult literacy programs are well-informed about family planning concerns and have a favorable outlook on them. Therefore, it is possible to draw the conclusion that women who have participated in adult literacy programs are more perceptive and engage in various work initiatives and health awareness issues for both themselves and their

children based on the results of research conducted in various developing countries (Farooqi et al., 2023).

### **Adult Literacy and its Contribution to Socio-Cultural Development of Women**

Women's literacy and their children's schooling were positively correlated. Women with higher levels of education showed a greater desire to send their children to school. Furthermore, both parents with and without education agreed to provide their kids an education, but parents with more education were more content with their ability to support their kids in practical ways, including meeting with a teacher and discussing their progress. Wetheridge (2016) connote that the significant social benefits of adult literacy were still another important social gain. Kagitcibasi et al. (2005) show how involvement in the functional adult literacy project improved women's social mobility and gave them interaction possibilities.

Additionally, the scant information available on the cultural benefits of adult literacy suggests that adult literacy and education initiatives can bring about a shift in people's perceptions, values, and behaviors. According to a study that examined meetings and examinations with Nigerian women, educated women are spending more on leisure and relaxation, which highlights the differences between the daily routines of literate and uneducated women (Ayantunji, 2023). According to another study, educated women are less likely than uneducated women to persist with societal practices that are harsh on women, such as the lengthy and frightening customs of grieving partners passing away (Kreager et al., 2013).

According to the results of all the studies mentioned above, the researcher can contend that adult literacy enhances children's education, women's mobility in public and gives them chances for interaction, a sense of self-worth and confidence, and assertiveness in social situations; it also increases women's spending on leisure and rest and lessens the unpleasant custom of grieving for the loss of a spouse, among other things. All of these, nevertheless, could only come to be if mentors and adult education facilitators provided women with high-quality and relevant training that inspired them to think creatively. For the shift to be successful, courses are developed with an awareness of the local social context and gender relations must also be in place.

### **Adult Literacy and its Contribution to Economic Development of Women**

It has been believed that improving adult literacy is essential to developing human capital. Human capital and growth across fourteen OECD countries have demonstrated a strong correlation between investments in human capital, economic growth, and labour productivity. Additionally, the positive relationship between economic advancement, literacy levels, and the effects of educational participation in economic development is well established. The study was noteworthy because it was the first to show that a nation's literacy level in relation to the global average was linked to a 2.5 percent relative gain in labour productivity and a 1.5 percent increase in GDP per capita (Sinclair, 2017).

In the same way, since education levels influence the kind of jobs people find, adult literacy has been linked to economic success. According to Fiedrich & Jellema (2003) adult literacy increases the population's earning potential and profit. Adult literacy has a positive effect on the country's economic development in addition to helping people become more proficient in procurement-related tasks (UNESCO, 2005). According to Antoninis et al. (2020) literacy is positively correlated with people's labor force participation and income. It may be claimed that persons with stronger literacy abilities are more likely to be employed, and to be paid more than people with poorer literacy skills. On the other hand, if literacy improvement was a slow and expensive effort, the gains would be judged minor.

Additionally, Kabeer (2005) explains that there must be an alternative in order for people to make a crucial decision (the real decision). Poverty and disempowerment are inextricably linked since the inability to provide for one's basic necessities and dependence on powerful people reduces one's capacity for complete decision-making. According to the discussion above, empowerment may include a variety of traits, including the ability to make decisions, access to resources and information, a variety of options from which to choose, assertiveness, a sense of hope that one can make a difference, the ability to think critically, and a new perspective. Women's self-worth, their freedom to make and make decisions, their access to resources and opportunities, their ability to take charge of their own lives both inside and outside the home, and their capacity to shape social change in order to establish a more equitable socioeconomic system both domestically and internationally are all important elements of the process of women's empowerment.

### **The Relationship between Adult Literacy and Women's Empowerment**

The significance of adult literacy for empowerment or life is regarded as essential to sustainable and fair development. EFA aim four, which calls for equal access to basic education for all adults and a 50% increase in adult literacy by 2015, particularly for women, was emphasized by UNESCO (2006). This was primarily due to the fact that literacy has evolved from being a set of fundamental skills for writing, reading, and numeracy to a more structured or socio-cultural concept in which obtaining education enabled people to make significant changes in their political, economic, and social lives. According to the UNESCO assessment, adult literacy equipped marginalized groups women in particular with the necessary information, abilities, and attitudes to enable them to fully engage in society. The key supportive was that if the unskilled people comprehend their condition, know their rights and learn skills denied to them, empowerment would follow. As to researcher's understanding, adult literacy is connected to women's empowerment in no less than two ways: "Micro" and "Macro".

- a. At the micro level, non-formal training programs and adult literacy initiatives can be planned and executed in a way that is "engaging" for women, allowing them to write about their own education, create their own insights, and collaborate on discussions about specific circumstances in their own life.
- b. On a macro level, adult literacy and non-formal education initiatives can directly support extensive processes of socioeconomic empowerment, which include the ability of individuals, groups, and communities to gain control over their own affairs and their surroundings.

Farooqi et al. (2023) Adult literacy is a crucial instrument for women's empowerment. However, in order for adult reading skills to empower people, they must be supported by a participatory method and material that challenges traditional gender relations features that, regrettably, are absent from the vast majority of literacy programs. Given that Freire's conscientization beliefs were a key component of the empowerment paradigm, it is clear that his theory was very significant in this context. Women must acknowledge that institutional and structural discrimination is the root cause of their issues if they are to take the proper steps to close the gender gap or gender inequities. They must also be aware of the part they frequently play in maintaining the structure that limits their development.

## **Conclusion**

Generally, this paper wishes to conclude that the Federal Government intention of making education accessible to everybody is a project which success lies on the cooperation of administrators,

facilitators and indeed the adult learners. Therefore, all hand should be on deck to see the total success of adult education programmes for attainment of adult education towards economic development objectives as education for all, is the responsible for all. This could be made possible if government can ensure that, its greatest budgetary allocation goes to the education sector with much priority to education of adults including women for the success of adult and non-formal education programmes. And each state government should also improve in the support adult education more especially in the provision of adequate instructional facilities required for the implementation of adult education programmes in Nigeria so as to speedy up adult education objectives.

### **Recommendation**

To enhance the economic empowerment of women in Nigeria through adult literacy programmes, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Increase Funding and Support:** The Federal Government of Nigeria should increase funding and support for adult literacy programmes, targeting women in rural and disadvantaged areas.
2. **Capacity Building for Facilitators:** Provide regular training and capacity-building programmes for facilitators to enhance their teaching skills and effectiveness.
3. **Community Engagement and Mobilization:** Encourage community leaders and stakeholders to support and mobilize women to participate in adult literacy programmes.
4. **Curriculum Review and Development:** Review and develop the adult literacy curriculum to include vocational skills training, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress and impact of adult literacy programmes on women's economic empowerment.
6. **Collaboration with Stakeholders:** Foster partnerships with NGOs, private sector organizations, and community-based groups to support the implementation and sustainability of adult literacy programmes.
7. **Technology Integration:** Leverage technology, such as mobile learning platforms and digital resources, to increase access to adult literacy programmes and improve learning outcomes.
8. **Women's Empowerment and Support Services:** Provide additional support services, such as childcare, healthcare, and counseling, to address the unique challenges faced by women and enhance their participation in adult literacy programmes.

By implementing these recommendations, adult literacy programmes can be more effective in promoting women's economic empowerment and contributing to the overall development of Nigeria.

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