

THE ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN THE EXPANSION OF LITERACY OPPORTUNITIES TO DISADVANTAGED GROUPS IN AKWA IBOM STATE: EMPIRICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the pivotal role of adult education programme in expanding literacy opportunities to disadvantaged groups in Akwa Ibom State. It examined how the programme address the educational needs of the disadvantaged groups i.e. women, rural inhabitants and the minorities. The study utilizes mixed-method approach, quantitative survey and qualitative interview to investigate the effectiveness, accessibility and the impact of adult education programme in Akwa Ibom State. The findings indicate that adult education programme significantly enhances literacy rates, empowers participants with essential life skills and fosters socio-economic development of its participants. However, challenges such as funding, inadequate infrastructure and cultural barriers still persist. Ultimately, the research advocates for improved resource allocation, policy reforms and innovative strategies as measures towards ensuring that adult education serves as a transformative tool for social equity and inclusion.

Key words: Adult education programmes, Disadvantaged groups, Literacy opportunities

Introduction

Literacy comprises a set of cognitive and social practices needed to function effectively in a modern society. Literacy empowers individuals to access, appraise and use information encountered in daily life to proffer solutions to human problems. Adult education programme have been recognized as a critical component in the expansion of literacy opportunities to all who have not been able to fit into the traditional education system. The traditional school-based system has inflexible structures, unrelatable content and insufficient support mechanisms that fail to meet the diverse needs of adult learners. Therefore, adult education programme is

critically structured to address the educational needs of diverse groups of learners ranging from economically disadvantaged individuals, women facing gender-based educational disparities, rural populations with limited access to formal schooling to minority groups who experience social, economic, or cultural marginalization (Nwizu and Olori, 2023).

One of the primary goals of Adult education programme is to bridge the literacy gap existing among diverse disadvantaged groups. Adult education programme enable adults to acquire essential literacy and numeracy skills which are fundamental for personal and professional development through the provision of flexible and accessible learning opportunities. Literacy transcends mere reading and writing, it empowers individuals to critically analyse situations, make informed decisions and improve their standard of livelihood for effective functioning in the society.

Disadvantaged groups are those group of people that face significant barriers in accessing quality education thereby leading to persistent cycles of penury and limited opportunities for self development. These groups include individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic minorities, rural population, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups. Limited literacy constrains employability, economic participation, healthcare navigation, civic engagement and general well-being. Without proper intervention, these disadvantages are bound to perpetuate across generations. As clearly pointed out by Idoko (2024), adult education programme have the capacity to address these challenges through the expansion of literacy rate and empowerment of the disadvantaged groups.

UNESCO (2016) offers a comprehensive definition of adult education by describing it as the entirety of organized educational processes, regardless of content, level or methods offered to adult learners for the purpose of self development. Such educational processes can occur in a formal school setting such as Schools, Colleges and Universities or in an informal setting such as apprenticeships. Based on this perspective, adult education involves individuals considered adults by societal standards, who aim to develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge and enhance their professional qualifications. The goal is to foster changes in attitudes and behaviors, thereby promoting personal growth and enabling active participation in social, economic and cultural affairs.

Adult education is also regarded as the provision of largely, non-vocational education for people who dropped out of school and are not formally registered for a College or University education that can lead to certification. Day-time or evening tuition can be provided by an Extra-Mural or Extension Department, College, Uuniversity or by other institutions such as

Trade unions or the Workers Educational Association. Such training can cover wide range of cultural, recreational, community and sporting activities.

Adult education programmes are often designed to be responsive to the specific needs of the learners they serve. For example, programmes targeting economically disadvantaged individuals might focus on vocational training and skill development that can enhance employability. For women, particularly in patriarchal societies, adult education programme can offer empowerment through knowledge acquisition thereby leading to greater participation in economic activities and community decision-making processes. In rural areas, adult education programmes may incorporate agricultural education and health literacy thus addressing the immediate needs of the community and promoting sustainable development. The overall goal of the study is to articulate how literacy outreach has helped disadvantaged groups in Akwa Ibom State to overcome barriers to empowerment and social inclusion.

Statement of the Problem

Despite significant progress in education, a substantial number of adults in Nigeria, particularly those from disadvantaged groups are not literate. This lack of literacy skills undoubtedly limits their ability to access better employment opportunities, participate fully in civic activities and improve their quality of life. Although various adult education programmes have been implemented to address this issue, their effectiveness in reaching and impacting the marginalized groups remains questionable. There is a critical need to evaluate the role of adult education programmes in expanding literacy opportunities to the disadvantaged groups in Nigeria. This study therefore seeks to identify the specific problems challenging the successful expansion of literacy rates among disadvantaged adult learners using adult learners in Akwa Ibom State

Research Questions

1. What are the specific adult education programmes currently available to disadvantaged groups in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State?
2. How effective are the Adult education programmes in improving the literacy rates among disadvantaged groups in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State?
3. What are the factors challenging adult education programmes in the engagement of disadvantaged groups in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State?
4. What are the strategies that can be implemented to enhance effectiveness in the expansion of adult education programmes to disadvantaged groups in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State?

Methodology

This study employed Descriptive survey research design to explore the current status of adult education programmes and their impact on literacy among disadvantaged groups in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State. The population of the study includes all the adult learners and facilitators of adult education programmes in adult education centres and key stakeholders across adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State, The study utilized multi-stage sampling technique. Stratified sampling technique was used to divide the population of the study into three groups based on the three senatorial districts of the State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select two adult learning centers from each District i.e. one urban and one rural adult education center thus resulting in six adult learning centers in all. In each selected adult learning centers, Equal Quota sampling technique was used to select 35 respondents from each centre, thus, resulting in a total of 210 respondents as sample size for the study. Additionally, 12 key stakeholders were also interviewed. The primary instrument for data collection was a structured Questionnaire for learners and facilitators and a semi-structured interview guide for stakeholders.

Quantitative data from the instruments were analyzed using Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviations. Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed thematically, involving coding and identifying key themes and patterns. The mixed-method approach provided a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness, challenges, and improvement strategies of adult education programmes in enhancing literacy opportunities for disadvantaged groups in Akwa Ibom State.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the specific adult education programmes currently available to disadvantaged groups in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State?

The study identified several specific adult education programmes available to disadvantaged groups in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State. The summary is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Adult education programmes currently available to disadvantaged groups in Akwa Ibom State

Adult Education programme	Mean	Standard Deviation
Basic Literacy Programmes	3.63	1.03
Post-Literacy Programmes	2.96	0.89
Vocational Training Programmes	3.41	0.97
Health Education Programmes	3.59	1.12

Basic Literacy Programmes have the highest mean score of 3.63, thus, indicating that they are the most widely participated Programmes among the disadvantaged groups. Health Education Programmes follow closely with a mean score of 3.59, highlighting their substantial presence and importance. Vocational Training Programmes also have a high mean score of 3.41, suggesting they are a significant part of the adult education Programmes. However, Post-Literacy Programmes have the lowest mean score of 2.96, indicating that they are less participated programmes in comparison to the other programmes.

As reflected by their high mean scores, Basic Literacy Programmes and Health Education Programmes are the most prominent adult education programmes available to disadvantaged groups in adult education centre in Akwa Ibom State. Vocational Training Programmes also play a significant role while Post-Literacy Programmes, although available, is the less participated programme by adult learners in adult literacy centres in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Question 2: How effective are the Adult education programmes in improving the literacy rates among disadvantaged groups in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State? The summary of findings is presented on table 2 as follows:

Table 2: Effects of Adult education programmes in improving literacy rates among disadvantaged groups in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State

Adult Education programmes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Enhanced Employability	2.84	0.89
Improved Literacy Skills	3.72	0.99
Health Awareness	3.57	0.97

The data indicates that the most significant impact of Adult education programmes in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State is on improved literacy skills followed by health awareness. These two areas have relatively high mean scores of 3.72 and 3.57 respectively. This suggests that the programmes are mostly effective in these domains. On the other hand, the impact of Adult education programmes on employability is less pronounced 2.84 when compared with other two areas. The study found out that Adult education programmes in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State have positive impact on literacy rates among disadvantaged groups in the State.

This information highlights the strength of the current adult education programmes in fostering essential literacy skills and health knowledge among disadvantaged groups in Adult education

centres in Akwa Ibom State. It also points to a potential area for improvement which is enhancement of employability skills thus enabling adult learners to leverage on their education for economic opportunities.

Research Question 3: What are the factors challenging adult education programmes in the engagement of disadvantaged groups in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State?

The study identified key factors challenging adult education programmes in the engagement of disadvantaged groups in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State. Table 3 presents the summary of findings as follows:

Table 3: Factors challenging adult education programmes in the engagement of disadvantaged groups in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State

Adult Education programmes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Limited funding	3.67	1.22
Inadequate infrastructure	3.52	1.18
Low awareness	2.41	0.87
Cultural barriers	2.37	1.02
Transportation issue	3.27	0.88

Table 3 reveals the most significant challenges facing Adult education programmes in adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State as limited funding and inadequate infrastructure. Both domains have high mean scores of 3.67 and 3.52 respectively. Transportation issue is also a notable challenge though less critical. On the other hand, low awareness and cultural barriers are perceived as less significant obstacles, though they still pose challenges to the effective implementation and engagement of adult education programmes.

These findings suggest that addressing the issues of funding and infrastructure should be a priority for improvement in the engagement of disadvantage groups in adult education programmes in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State. Furthermore, enhancement of transportation facilities can alleviate some of the factors constraining effective engagement of disadvantaged groups in these programmes. While low awareness and cultural barriers are less critical, they should not be overlooked, as they still affect the overall effectiveness of the programmes.

Research Question 4: What are the strategies that can be implemented to enhance effectiveness in the expansion of adult education programmes to disadvantaged groups in Adult education centres in Akwa Ibom State?

Respondents were presented with some suggested solutions and their responses are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Strategies for the enhancement of effectiveness in the expansion of adult education programmes for disadvantaged in Adult education centres Akwa Ibom State

Adult Education programme	Mean	Standard Deviation
Increased Funding	3.72	1.09
Community Outreach	3.13	1.21
Infrastructure Development	3.56	1.33
Flexible Scheduling of classess	3.42	1.20
Cultural Sensitivity Training	2.55	0.98
Transportation Solutions	3.20	1.04

The data in table 4 highlights that increased funding is the most crucial strategy for enhancing effectiveness in the expansion of adult education programmes to the disadvantaged groups in the study area. Infrastructure development and flexible scheduling of classes are also seen as significant strategies, though there is some variability in how strongly respondents feel about their importance. Community outreach and transportation solutions are considered moderately important, while cultural sensitivity training is seen as less critical, though still relevant.

These findings suggest that prioritizing funding and infrastructure improvement can significantly enhance effectiveness in the expansion of adult education programmes to the disadvantaged groups in the study area. Also, the implementation of flexible scheduling of classes and community outreach efforts can further improve effectiveness in the expansion of adult education programmes. While cultural sensitivity training and transportation solutions are less critical, they should still be considered as part of a comprehensive strategy to address the needs of the disadvantaged groups.

Discussion

The first finding revealed that Basic Literacy Programmes are the most prevalent among disadvantaged groups in Akwa Ibom State; Health Education Programmes also have a significant presence, closely followed by Vocational Training Programmes. Post-Literacy Programmes have the lowest mean score, indicating they are less prevalent or less participated in comparison to other programmes. The findings is in tandem with UNESCO (2016), which highlighted the prominence of basic literacy programmes in many developing countries, thus

emphasizing on its foundational role in adult education. However, a study by Agbulu (2016) contradicts the findings of the study by asserting that vocational training programmes were more prevalent in some regions of Nigeria due to the immediate employability benefits they offer to participants which is important for sustainable development.

Similarly, the finding showed that adult education programmes are most effective in improving literacy skills, health awareness and enhanced employability though to varying extent.

The findings also indicated that limited funding is the most significant challenge, followed by inadequate infrastructure. Transportation issues also present a notable challenge, whereas low awareness and cultural barriers are less significant. Similar challenges were identified by Abanyam, Edeh, Victor (2016), who emphasized on the critical role of funding and infrastructure in the success of adult education programmes. In contrast, cultural barriers were highlighted as a more significant issue in a study by Kaestle, Campbell, Finn, Johnson and Mickulecky (2001), particularly in rural areas where traditional belief may hinder participation in adult education.

Finally, the findings highlighted that increased funding and infrastructure development are perceived as the most crucial strategies. Flexible scheduling of classes and transportation solutions are also important, while community outreach and cultural sensitivity training are seen as moderately important. The emphasis on funding and infrastructure aligns with the recommendations of Agugum, Okwarachukwu, Ikedi (2021), who argued that sustainable adult education requires substantial financial and infrastructural investment. Obinna-Akakuru, Ibe, Akakuru and Nelson-Okafor (2021) supported the need for flexible scheduling by asserting that teaching methodologies that enhances the interest of the adult learners as well as their diverse schedules should be adopted by facilitators. However, the lower importance placed on cultural sensitivity training differs from findings by Torres (2003), who underscored the necessity of culturally responsive teaching methods in adult education.

Conclusion

The study investigated the role of adult education programmes in expanding literacy opportunities for disadvantaged groups in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. It reviewed evidence on how these tailored community programmes improve functional literacy levels and produce broader social impacts; challenges to implementation were also discussed. The findings reveal that Basic Literacy Programmes and Health Education Programmes are the most prominent, this indicated their critical role in providing foundational skills and essential health knowledge to the target populations. Vocational Training Programmes also play a significant role,

although Post-Literacy Programmes are less prevalent. The effectiveness of these programmes is evident in their ability to improve literacy skills and health awareness, although their impact on employability is less pronounced. The primary challenges identified include limited funding, inadequate infrastructure and transportation issues, which significantly hinder engagement and expansion of these programmes.

Strategies to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of adult education programmes include increased funding, infrastructure development, flexible scheduling and transportation solutions. While community outreach and cultural sensitivity training are also important, they are perceived as moderately impactful compared to other strategies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Government and non-governmental organizations should allocate more resources to adult education programme to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the programme.
2. Investment in physical facilities such as classrooms, libraries and learning materials is essential. Modern, well-equipped centers will attract more learners and provide a conducive learning environment.
3. Continuous assessment of adult education programmes is necessary to measure their impact and identify areas for improvement.
4. Regular monitoring and evaluation exercise can enhance effective programmes delivery for optimal outcome.
5. Collaboration between government, private sector and civil society is crucial. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can bring in diverse resources; promote expertise and perspectives thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of adult education programmes in the state.

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