

Women participation in adult literacy programs for sustainable development in Nigeria: implication for national development

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Abstract

This paper examined women participation in adult literacy programmes for sustainable development as it affects national development in Nigeria. Further discussed in the paper are the concepts of women participation, adult literacy programmes and sustainable development, adult literacy programmes and national development, equality of educational opportunity, accessibility and Education for All (EFA). Learning environment, manpower requirement, family responsibility and economic background were some of the factors discussed by the authors as factors militating against women participation in adult literacy programmes. The paper also highlighted some solutions to challenges militating against women participation in adult literacy programmes in Nigeria. Solutions to the challenges were also proffered. Also, x-rayed in the paper is the modernization theory and its implication to women's participation in adult literacy programme for sustainable development. It was concluded among other things, that it is imperative for women to participate in adult literacy programmes because they occupy a sizeable number in the population of the country; as their involvement will result in reasonable sustained national development. Recommendations were finally made for further improvement in women participation in adult literacy programmes in Nigeria.

Keywords: adult literacy, sustainable development, women participation, national development

Introduction

Despite the fact that literacy has been recognized as a basic human right, women have continued to face a lot of challenges trying to measure up in their academic achievement. While literacy has increased on the development agenda over the past decades, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS) in

2015 data showed that 758 million adults lack reading and writing skills, out of which two-thirds were women as at 2014. It was further revealed that more women are unable to read and write in 77 countries as compared to men. More so, 63 to 64 percentage of women population are identified to be illiterate (UNESCO Institute for Statistics Report, 2015). In both Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan African, around one in

three adults are illiterate whereas in Northern Africa and Western Asia, the proportion is nearly one in five (Dutt, 2017). He also revealed that in Afghanistan, the figure shows that literate rates for males are more than twice those of women.

The above revelation increased both international and national efforts on how to increase women's participation in literacy. Several programmes and activities have been advocated for the enhancement of women's participation in adult literacy. Examples of such programmes as stated in Dutt (2017) are 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAN), the 1995 Beijing Declaration and platform for action, Goal 4 and 5 of the 2000 Education for All which focus on achieving fifty percent improvement in levels of adult literacy and eliminating gender disparities and achieving gender equality in education respectively.

The debate on women participation in adult literacy and the need to integrate them into development process of the nation is not the concern of international community alone. Nigeria as a nation has also made efforts toward increasing women participation in adult literacy by adopting and implementing the international declarations on women literacy. Some of these declarations have been made policies in Nigeria in order to increase women participation in adult literacy.

The essence these frantic efforts is that development cannot be one-sided if it must be sustained. For development to attain its rightful course and remain sustainable, all members of the society, irrespective of gender, have to be given equal opportunity to participate in the developmental process and this is easily achieved based on the literacy level of such a society.

Nwachukwu, Chigbo and Ugunadi (2017) asserted that women contribute a lot to the economic development of any nation and are crucial in the

development of any society and that their participation in adult literacy programmes are central to a holistic approach towards establishing new patterns and processes of development that are sustainable. While the need for national development has become the concern of all countries of the world, adult literacy programme is very critical in promoting sustainable development. Adult literacy is an important factor towards the preparation of individuals including women for participation in national development. In the economic sphere, women are very helpful in the production of the nation's wealth through economic activities.

Conceptual Review

2.1 Women Participation

Participation refers to active involvement in programmes that are of best interest to a person. It includes planning, designing, implementing and subsequent maintenance of the said interest. It is a process by which people are mobilized to manage available resources for improved outcome. Women participation therefore means mobilizing and involving women in developmental projects so as to enable them contribute their quota to both national and international development. Women's participation facilitates their direct involvement in decision-making on national issues and such participation makes women more responsible and accountable.

Women participation in national development exposes them to active roles in politics, active participation in policy formulation and interpretation, engaging in any profession of their choice, and widening their academic horizon through further studies as well as liberty for career advancement. Premise on World Bank (1996) assertion; that participation is a process by which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and resources that affect them, women

participation in the development of their country should not be an issue of national debate because they are stakeholders in the country by citizenship. To further buttress on the impact of stakeholders in decision-making process, Imperato and Ruster (2003) maintained that when stakeholders are actively involved in all stages of decision making process, developmental problem and needs are easily understood by everyone, thus, making solutions to be proffered easily.

2.2 Concept of Adult Literacy Programmes

Literacy by layman's definition could be seen as the ability to read and write but in a broader sense, literacy can be defined as the ability to read, write and compute. However, different people and countries see literacy from different perspective. The United State of America view literacy as the ability to use printed and written information to function in the society, to achieve one's goals; and also, to develop one's knowledge and potential.

Ofoegbu and Agboeze (2014) saw literacy as the ability of an individual to read, write, calculate and be empowered on how best to make a living, particularly from the view of poverty deduction.

UNESCO (2008) described literacy as a dynamic concept that encompasses a whole range of more complex and diverse skills and understandings such as work literacy, functional literacy, civic literacy, and health literacy education. All these put together, help an adult to possess the kind of confidence that enables him to think right and get involved in the development of his nation sustainably.

Nzeneri and Ogili (2000) also agreed that the essence of literacy is for the development of not just the individual but the nation at large. In this case while an adult acquires literacy to be liberated from ignorance, poverty as well as unemployment, the country equally benefits, because such an adult has the capacity to participate positively in nation building.

An adult can then be referred to as a person who has grown into maturity and is ready to take full responsibility for his actions. Houle in Nzeneri (2008) described an adult as a person who has achieved full physical development and expects to have the right to participate as a responsible homemaker and member of the society.

This means that so much is expected from an adult, especially the women folk. Eheazu (2016) supported this notion by maintaining that adults are the largest group of people in the society. They form the largest portion in the population, hence, their impact on the society through their socio-economic activities.

Adult literacy is therefore the provision made available through an educational programme for people who are 18years and above to learn how to use printed and written information for their benefit and society. Adult literacy creates a consciousness that allows an individual to plan, cope with and at the same time find solutions to issues that challenge the sustainable future of their lives. The direct influence in which literacy has on national development makes it imperative for every member of a nation to be actively involved in adult literacy programme in order to be able to make valuable contributions to the society.

Adult literacy programme is therefore literacy programmes designed to assist adult members of a society in acquiring reading and writing abilities as well as soft and technical skills. These programmes include functional literacy, vocational literacy, health awareness programmes etc.

Concept of Sustainable Development

Development has to do with economic and social transformation of standard of living of people as well as that of the society. Udabah (2002) agreed that development is an improvement in living condition and industrialisation. However, development in modern society could be concluded to be

meaningless without such development having the capacity to sustain future generations. Munasinghe (2004) therefore stated that sustainable development is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individuals and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental system.

This means that for any development effort to be seen as being sustainable, such development effort must be visionary to what is needed for the now and able to span to the future. If it is reducing the poverty rate or protecting the population growth, such development has to continue into the future. This is the reason holistic objective of sustainable development is to continue to improve human well-being through a combination of economic prosperity, social inclusion, ending poverty and ensuring environmental sustainability (Sachs, 2016).

International Labour Organisation (2002) sees sustainable development as a systematic approach to growth and development, management of natural resources and social welfare of the citizens of a country and thus, preserving them for future generation. This makes the primary focus of adult education programme to be the fostering of development. When the adult members of any society are privilege to acquire literacy skill, the possibility of higher percentage of their generation to be literate is very realistic.

Those who acquire vocational skills are likely to transfer same to generation following them especially in the same family lineage. This is sustainable and thus makes adult literacy a cornerstone for sustainable development.

2.4 Women Participation in Adult and Non-Formal Education in Nigeria

Achieving sustainable development in any society may not be easily actualized without the involvement of every member of that society. In order to achieve this, efforts must come from very enlightened people who have acquired a level of literacy either formally, informally or non-formally.

However, Africa as a continent suffers some setbacks due to cultural practices and religious beliefs which reduce women to second-class citizens and hinder their free access to education (Agbugui, 2006). This had affected their enrolment and completion of school at their young age. The provision on the revised national policy on education to accommodate mass literacy, adult and non-formal education irrespective of sex and age has given women opportunity to participate in adult literacy.

Varrela (2020) report adult female in literacy as at 2019 rate to be less than 50% in the North, the South has a percentage rated at 80. Acquisition of literacy help women to keep basic financial records, handle appropriate modern technology, develop some leadership qualities that can contribute to political and economic stability of their communities (Koko,, Ofoegbu and Otari, 1995).

2.5 The Roles of NGOs towards Women Participation in adult and Non-Formal Education in Nigeria

The education of women in the society is affected by cultural and religious beliefs, parental background, attitude, expectations, biases and household labour among other things. These have, however, affected the participation of women in adult education programme.

Paiko (2012) disclosed that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), international and local, have put in their efforts in breaking the distinction between male and female access to education especially in Nigeria.

He further stated that they complement government effort universal basic education through the formal and non-formal education, most especially on improving educational services for educationally disadvantaged citizen especially the female. NGOs give scholarship and equally donate materials like textbooks, biros, exercise books as well as payment of stipends to women who are in school.

Paiko specifically noted the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) assists directly in women welfare promotion project, including basic education in Bauchi, Plateau and Ondo States. They are involved in training and skills development for women through adult and non-formal education. Their engagement in capacity building for women helps in enhancing their technical competence.

2.6 Modernization Theory and Its Implication for Women Participation in Adult Literacy for Sustainable Development

Modernization theory is used to explain the process of modernization within societies. Modernization theory originated from Max Weber in 1864-1920. It emphasizes that a society can move from traditional to modern society. The implication of modernization theory to this paper is that people need to acquire a certain level of education to be able to transit from tradition to modernization. Again, the transition is not expected to be one-sided but comprehensive. This means that everyone has to be involved of which women are included.

Modernization is internal achievement of a society; whose particular processes support each other in combination; the leading nations do not impede the followers; the processes of modernization is converging in a common goal (Berger, 1996). This means development cannot be handled by only a particular group of persons in the society, it has to be supported by all, irrespective of gender.

In this case, there is a need for the society to discard discriminatory practices e.g., some obnoxious cultural belief, gender bias, religious sentiment and so on, that impede women from participating in adult literacy as it is a means through which they acquire learning that will further enhance their contributions to national development.

Modernization theory attempts to identify the social variables that contribute to social progress and development of the societies, it also seeks to explain the process of social evolution. This is why the revised National Policy on Education has created opportunities for adults to be educated not minding the gender (NPE, 2013).

Smelser (1963) as one of the supporters of modernization approach developed a model based on structural differentiation of institutions. By differentiation, he meant the process by which more specialized institutional structure (autonomous social units) are established with special recognition to the economy. Economic development takes place through modernization of technology.

For modernization to take its full course in economic development, all human resources must be available and ready to participate actively. In a situation where women are left out, certain aspects of the development processes are bound to suffer.

2.7 Factors Militating Against Women Participation in Adult Literacy Programme

The following are the factors that may possibly affect women's participation in adult literacy programmes:

Learning Environment: While we concentrate on learners' output in school in terms of intelligence as the major pointer to academic performance, it is important to note that the learning environment is crucial. This is because the learning environment involves several variables that have direct and indirect effects on the learners which are external to them. It

has to be clean, serene, and conducive for learning at all times. An ideal learning environment should be a topmost priority while establishing a school whether for children or adults. Tshui and Cai (2011) described the learning environment as an orderly environment in which the school family feels valued and able to pursue the school's mission free from concern about disruption.

Factors like classroom painting and lighting, seat and sitting arrangement, the classroom climate, air quality or ventilation are very important and should be taken into consideration when establishing a school because they have a way of making the learning environment appealing and interesting to the learners and thus motivating them to learn.

No wonder, Olagboye (2004) maintained that the physical environment, if adequately provided and maintained, is capable of influencing the students and the teachers positively. Manninen (2007) in OECD (2011) revealed that the learning environment in its widest sense, is a combination of formal and informal education system where learning takes place for the purpose of the set objectives. The set objective must be the kind that allows a woman who is already an adult and married ample opportunity to gain knowledge that can assist her deliver on her duty as a housewife.

Most women may feel reluctant to participate in adult literacy programme where the physical environment is not appealing enough for learning. Again, there are women who were not opportune to go to conventional schools in their youthful age before getting married. For those who desire to advance their academic level, when such an opportunity presents itself, they have no choice than to shoulder the challenges of advancing their education alongside their family responsibilities.

These glaring problems necessitated the need for a conducive school environment that will assist these

women to solve the issues confronting their life pursuits. In the case where the available school environment falls short of their expectation, their level of participation in the adult literacy programme tends to diminish. Furthermore, the method of teaching adults unlike children to a large extent has to be andragogical.

Andragogy requires the employment of special method of impacting knowledge and skills to adults. The andragogic method of teaching identifies the fact that as a person grows, the person moves from the trait of total dependency to an increased self-concept. At this level, he knows what he wants in life; the level of his psychology is mature that he can take decision for himself.

These women when they find themselves in an adult literacy programme, they already know what they want to learn and the result they should get with the readiness to solve an impending problem. They also want a school environment where they are respected and accorded due dignity. A woman can withdraw from a learning environment that would want to make her feel like a child. Since they are already grown up, they would always want to be identified and treated as such.

Some adult literacy centers are still as analog as its inception despite the advent of technology. It is expected that a literacy environment answers to the call of modern technological advancement to enable the learners compete with their contemporaries whenever the needs arise.

A literacy centre that has not yielded to the call of ICT for the transmission of knowledge stands the chance of losing its participants. The use of computer and internet facilities in lesson delivery has a way of enhancing the lesson.

Apparently, the rationale behind most women enrolling for adult literacy programme is their inability to neither read nor write. Premise on this, they need

a rich literate environment that offers an opportunity to read and write within a specific time frame. Global Monitoring Report (2006) defined a rich literate environment as a learning environment with abundant written documents (e.g. books, magazines, newspapers), visual materials (e.g. signs, posters, handbills), or communication and electronic media (e.g. radio, televisions, computers, mobile phones). These are lacking in most adult education centres. Some centres lack written, printed and visual materials that can assist the learners to acquire good reading skills.

Manpower Requirement: Ihejirika and Onyenemezu (2012) describe manpower as human resources available in the country. The available manpower can consistently improve through the use of adult literacy which create opportunity for development of relevant skills for optimal performance at the workplace. Women constitute a significant number in the country's population and as such should not be relegated to the background on matters that has to do with the country's development. Like every other member of the society, they are expected to participate and make cogent contributions in manpower development.

However, in Nigeria women have been left behind in many fields of human endeavor e.g in education, politics, leadership position and in male dominated professions.

While adult literacy might be available to provide the cheapest and the shortest way for manpower training, some society because of certain cultural beliefs do not permit women participation. It is generally belief that jobs like Engineering, Medicine, Geology, Accounting etc are for men while women go for nursing, teaching, catering etc as a result of long-standing cultural perception.

All these hinder women participations in adult literacy as they are able to venture into profession of their

choice despite the available opportunity for them to do so.

Family Responsibility: A typical African society does not recognize women role in national development. It is often believed these women's activities centres around the home where they can do only domestic chores. This cultural belief system makes these women to be given out in marriage at early stage so as to give birth to children and take care of the home while the men are at work.

These early marriages prevent them from accessing literacy. Offor (2006) agrees that pre-colonial and colonial era opposition to western education was greater for girls than boys because it was believed that women education began and ended in the kitchen.

The impact of this obnoxious belief system is affecting the society even presently. Some societies still practice the archaic system of gender bias culture where women are not expected to participate in activities order than domestic chores and to worsen issues, they are given out for marriage at early age of 12years. This makes most women who would have gone to school, developed themselves and the society end up at home as full-time housewives. Odufawa and Dosumu (2008) maintained that these practices hinder women educational attainment and also constrain them from contributing to societal development.

Again, the idea of widowhood practices in some part of our country also hampers the participation of women in adult literacy. A woman, who lost the husband and would have probably found her way to back school, may not be able to do so because she is either forced into another marriage or inherited by the husband's family member or kinsmen.

All these happen forgetting that women are potent instrument in social emancipation and national development.

Research on family and community involvement has shown that children are more successful in school when parents and teachers communicate well and work together effectively (Epstein, 2011). The parent involved here are majorly the mothers (women), who even if they have a capacity to face their own studies, they could still be hindered by huge family responsibility of trying to keep track of children's activities in school and their own personal studies. When children return from school, it is still these women (their mothers) who are left with the responsibility of caring and cooking to enable the family move on without any hitch.

Some women find themselves in marriages that warrant them to be committed to their husbands' businesses to enable them to earn a living and live up to family demands, while others are even the breadwinners in their marriages. These women are constantly working extra hard to meet up with family and financial demand. All these challenges may frustrate these women to participate in adult literacy programmes, thus affecting their contributions to national development.

Economic Background: Even when education is said to be free at the basic education level, there are so many other financial commitments that a learner may need to meet up with. The policy on free education does not include free books, uniforms and depending on the distance, free transportation fare to school. The challenges of trying to meet up with several of these commitments make most women decide not to participate in adult literacy. Some of the women are not working and will have to depend on their husbands who may not have the financial ability to sponsor their wives and the children's schooling at the same time. In such a scenario, the woman has no choice than to stay back for the children to go to school.

Consequently, the factors enumerated above and many others have a way of affecting or stopping

women from participating in adult literacy. Though some women got an opportunity at adult age to participate in adult literacy, others missed it completely for life and as a result, affected national development in diverse ways.

2.8. Solution to challenges militating against women participation in adult literacy programmes in Nigeria

In finding solutions to the problems affecting women's participation in literacy, the following has to be observed:

The need to create a conducive environment that is also gender sensitive with modern technology.

Frequent training and capacity building for facilitator to update their knowledge and pedagogical skills in managing adult literacy programme to accommodate women.

Programmes of adult literacy must address women's responsibilities at home.

Time schedule for the programme should not conflict with business and work schedules.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Women participation in adult literacy is very important as they occupy a sizeable number of the population of the country. They have the potential of rapid sustainable development as they can easily affect the society from transforming their homes through their children and husbands. Women are naturally peace-makers; they have the capacity to build peaceful co-existence in their neighborhoods which also could have positive effect on nation building. This is why the education of women is seen as education of all. However, all these has not been maximally achieved as there are some factors that continuously militate against their participation in adult literacy programmes in the country.

Since some parts of the country might not want a female child to stay beyond the age of eighteen years without getting married, it will be important that such women take advantage of adult literacy programme, since it creates opportunities for people to learn and improve on themselves irrespective of their age. Adult literacy programmes offer these set of women opportunities to improve on their level of education that was constrained at a younger age.

Therefore, the adult literacy programme could be termed the hope of the hopeless in sustainable development. Based on the conclusion, the followings recommendations were raised:

1. All women have the same and equal opportunity to acquire both formal and non-formal education.
2. Conducive learning environment should be taken into consideration when establishing a school in order to make teaching and learning interesting.
3. Obnoxious beliefs affecting women participation in literacy programmes should be discarded.
4. The notion that some professions are mainly for the male gender should not be upheld.
5. Domestic chores should not be left only to the women.
6. Men should also take care of the home to create time for the women to participate in adult literacy.
7. Parents should place a higher premium on the education of both male and female children.

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