
**ADULT FUNCTIONAL LITERACY: EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATION
FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND WEALTH CREATION IN
ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Recent years have seen an increase in awareness of the value of empowering women via reading. Despite the crucial role that women play in the family and society, women in developing countries continue to face a number of problems related to gender inequality. The study explains how literacy instruction has helped women in Enugu State, Nigeria, to overcome oppression like assault, widowhood, and gender discrimination. The study was a descriptive survey. Three research questions and two hypotheses served as the study's guiding principles. The study used a cohort of 2671 adult female learners with a sample size of 348. Surveys were used to collect the data, which was then analyzed using the mean and t-test. The study discovered, among other things, that literacy teaching aided women in raising their awareness of delicate subjects including domestic violence against women, women's rights, and female engagement in civic life. The study found that literacy programmes gave women's groups the livelihood skills they needed to raise their families' standards of living, foster independence, and gain access to markets. The paper recommends, among other things, that the government and other partners should promote and support adult literacy programmes.

Keywords: Education, women, empowerment, adult literacy and wealth creations.

Introduction

The family unit is dominated by women (Dixon-Mueller, 1993). They support all facets of family life, including establishing a family, providing for the family's financial needs, raising children, and caring for the family. In addition to ensuring the stability of the family unit, they provide those in need with medical care, are crucial for obtaining food, and serve as the foundation for all socioeconomic activity (Mutangadura, n.d). Women's significant contributions to societal advancement as well as to the stability, growth, and long-term prosperity of countries, have long been acknowledged (Usman, 2020).

However, the pattern of women's poverty in Nigeria has often been a consequence of unequal institutional gender-role ascription; resulting to gender inequality, discrimination against women, lack of access to property and work education and government services, and these inhibitions have adverse impact on their lives (Tayo, 2013:6). Intimate partners are often the perpetrators of abuse against one in three women worldwide (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Infringing on their human rights, violence against women and girls can have deadly short- and long-term bodily, sexual, and mental effects (United Nations, 2020). Myths from African culture have an effect on widows' marginalization.

Women from low-income households, those with limited education or no education at all, and those who live in rural areas are disproportionately those who suffer from gender discrimination, violence, and dehumanizing widowhood rites. Most individuals in this category are illiterate, particularly those who reside in rural areas; as a result, they are unable to exercise their legal rights and lack the confidence, self-assurance, and resources necessary to stop any violation of those rights (Tayo, 2013).

It is true that those with low levels of education are more likely to have unsatisfying lives overall, poorer financial situations, and fewer favourable work chances (Duru, 2018). Women frequently deal with the effects of this, such as increased crime rates, welfare dependency, low self-esteem, economic, psychological, and social oppression. Because they struggle to complete basic tasks like filling out applications and forms, understanding governmental regulations, understanding food or medicine labels, and other routine tasks, individuals with low literacy rates are also less able to make important, informed decisions in their daily lives (World Literacy Foundation, 2018).

Literacy has been defined in a number of ways by various scholars and practitioners in education and development fields. Reading, writing and mathematical ability are the three components of literacy as they have traditionally been understood (Srivastava, 2017). Literacy is a powerful tool, a wide range of skills, and a competence; it is more than just the capacity to read and write. Reading comprehension covers both culture and language. It is an essential aspect of the right to education (United Nations, 2010). Numerous industries, including those related to education, health, agriculture, and other sectors, depend on literacy. Literacy components empower women to live above obnoxious cultural practices such as female genital mutilation, widowhood, early marriages and exchange for debts (Acha, 2016). To attain their objectives, advance their expertise and potential, and be prepared to fully participate in their community and greater society, people must move through a continuum of learning that includes literacy (UNESCO, 2005).

Recent years have seen an increase in awareness of the value of empowering women via reading. In 2017, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) published a list of literacy programmes that have positive effects on women's emancipation. There are case studies that demonstrate how literacy programmes in many parts of the world have created solutions to the problems that women face in the modern period. These studies not only demonstrated the importance of literacy programmes in empowering women, but they also highlighted the fact that literacy programmes go beyond merely providing opportunity for people to acquire the necessary reading and writing abilities. Education for girls, equity, violence, health, community involvement, and governance are all related to literacy programmes (UNESCO, 2017).

The majority of the women's literacy programmes presented utilized a systems approach, connecting literacy acquisition with earnings pursuits in manners that are highly applicable to the people's requirements and potentials of women. For example, Ethiopia's Integrated Women's Empowerment Linked with various literacy instructions with informal vocational training, business training, and assistance to assist adult women in rural areas improve their standard of living (UNESCO, 2017).

Other literacy programmes target women's learning by emphasizing their position as young mothers. An example of this is the Turkish Family Literacy Programme, particularly one of its core programmes, Mother-Child Education. It is a home-based, interdisciplinary programme for early childhood education (ECE) and adult education/literacy that serves socially disadvantaged children and their mothers, many of whom struggle with literacy (UNESCO, 2017). The Nigerian Mother and Child Education Programme (UNESCO/ECE, 2020) for instance, focuses on a range of issues, including adult literacy, early childhood education, health, civic education, environmental management and conservation, generating income, and promoting employment in rural regions. Additionally, an interconnected and cross-generational strategy is used in several case studies. Associação Progresso's blended literacy-gender delivers literacy training in native languages with an emphasis on raising consciousness of and advocating against domestic violence and human rights in remote communities in Mozambique (UNESCO, 2017). In addition, the programme runs with women and men who are already enrolled in literacy programmes in 20 locations. Local authorities include village chiefs, care staff, organizers of male and female initiation rites, and religious leaders.

Several studies have reported that, illiteracy is one of the major reasons why women in many parts of Nigeria still suffer from one form of gender discrimination, violence, and deprivation to the other. The study set out to examine literacy as a weapon for economic empowerment in communities in Enugu state, Nigeria, in light of the remarkable role literacy programmes have played in improving the lives of women in both developed and developing countries of the world.

The Study's Objectives

The main goal of this study is to examine literacy in the twenty-first century, a tool for women empowerment in communities in Enugu State, Nigeria. In particular, the research work examined literacy programmes as a tool for liberating women against:

- violence in Enugu State Nigeria;
- widowhood in Enugu State Nigeria; and
- gender discrimination in Enugu State Nigeria

Research Questions

1. How can literacy programmes liberate women against violence?
2. How can literacy programmes liberate women against widowhood?
3. How can literacy programmes liberate women against gender discrimination?

Hypothesis

1. There is no appreciable distinction between the mean responses of female adult learners from rural and urban areas on how literacy programmes can liberate women against violence.
2. There is no appreciable distinction between the mean responses of female adult learners from rural and urban areas on how literacy programmes can liberate women against gender discrimination

Methodology

Research Design

The design adopted for the study was the descriptive survey design. According to Ali (2006) a descriptive survey design is that which uses a sample of a population to explain, describe and document the characteristics and major elements of the phenomenon being investigated. This kind of design allows the researchers to use questionnaires and interviews to learn about people's attitudes, perceptions, and views on many topics.

Area of the Study

Enugu State, Nigeria served as the location for the research work. There are 17 Local Government Areas (Aninri, Awgu, Enugu East, Enugu North, Enugu South, Ezeagu, Igbo Etiti, Igbo Eze North, Igbo Eze South, Isi Uzo, Nkanu East, Nkanu West, Nsukka, Oji River, Udenu, Udi, and Uzo-Uwani) in Enugu State, with each having Adult Education Centers. The Adult education learning centres in the rural areas include; Igbo Etiti, Uzo-Uwani, Awgu, Aninri, Ezeagu, Udenu and Isi Uzo. While the adult education centers in the urban areas were; Enugu East, Enugu North, Igbo Eze North, Udi, Nkanu East, Nkanu West, Oji River, Nsukka and Enugu South.

Population for the Study

Population for the study comprised 2671 adult female learners in both the urban and rural adult education centers in Enugu State. A breakdown of the population for urban adult education centers showed a total of 1,425 female learners and 1,256 female learners in adult education centres in the rural areas of Enugu State. And the numbers of adult learners in each centre are: Aninri 140, Awgu 144, Enugu East 150, Enugu North 175, Enugu South 168, Ezeagu 150, Igbo Etiti 167, Igbo Eze North 185, Igbo Eze South 160, Isi Uzo 150, Nkanu East 160, Nkanu West 152, Nsukka 168, Oji River 173, Udenu 160, Udi 160, and Uzo-Uwani 83 adult female learners.

Sample and sampling technique for the study

The researchers adopted the Taro Yamani formula to draw a sample size of 348 respondents for the study. A Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to put together the sample. Stage one: Enugu East, Igbo Eze North, Isi uzo, Nkanu West, Igbo Eze South and Udi Adult Education Centers were purposively selected because, these centers are active with Adult Education Programmes. Second stage: Adult Education female learners were randomly selected from each center proportionately.

Instruments for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire designed by the researchers was the instrument used to collect data. The questionnaire is divided into sections I and II. Section I was structured to obtain personal information about the respondents, while section II was structured to elicit information on adult

functional literacy for women empowerment. Section II has a total of 17 items which were further grouped into three clusters in line with the specific objectives of the study. Cluster A has 6 items, while cluster B has 4 items and cluster C has 7 items questions. The questionnaire items was structured based on a modified four-point Likert scale, running from strongly disagree (1 point) to strongly agree (4 points). The instrument was faced-validated by three Experts (All three are from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka: one from the Measurement and Evaluation Unit, in the Department of Science Education, and two from the Department of Adult Education and Extra Mural Studies). Data obtained from the trial testing were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha method to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The device demonstrated extremely high dependability, with a reliability value of 0.87.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents at the corresponding adult literacy centres in Enugu State by the researchers and one research assistant using a direct manner and collected from them after filling. The methods for distributing and immediately gathering responses from respondents were explained to the research assistant. This made sure that the respondents filled out the questionnaire correctly. As a result, the questionnaire received a one hundred percent response rate and was properly used for data processing.

Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential data analysis were used in this study. The mean and standard deviation were used to address the research questions posed. A threshold mean of 2.50 was used as the norm for decision-making for each item because a four-point rating scale was used for the study. Items having a mean of 2.50 or higher were therefore declared acceptable by the respondents, whilst items with a mean lower than 2.50 were deemed unacceptable. The difference between the mean replies of Adult literacy learners from rural and urban locations were examined at $p < 0.05$ using an independent sample t-test.

Three hundred and forty eight (348) adult female learners filled out the questionnaire. The opinions of the respondents were calculated for each item on the questionnaire. The outcomes in the Tables indicate the three research questions and two hypotheses that served as the foundation for the

Results

Research Question 1: How can literacy programmes liberate women against violence?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of respondents' replies to items on how literacy programmes can liberate women against violence

S/ N	Items:	\bar{X}	std	Remark
1	Literacy programmes are capable of boosting women's leadership skills and access to decision-making positions	3.16	0.93	Agreed
2	Economic independence is possible for women in the rural areas through literacy programme	2.87	0.89	Agreed
3	Literacy programmes is capable of making women gain access to the right information that would enable them to get out of abusive domestic relationships	3.21	0.83	Agreed
4	Women that gain exposure to literacy education would not encourage their daughters' to enter into early marriage	2.60	0.91	Agreed
5	Literacy programmes is capable of increasing the awareness of women in the rural areas of every form of oppression	2.76	0.89	Agreed
6	Literacy instruction helped women become more aware of sensitive issues like gender-based violence in families and women's rights	2.97	0.84	Agreed

Note: \bar{X} = Mean, std = Standard Deviation, N = Number of Respondents = 348

The mean and standard deviation of the respondents' replies to questions items on how literacy programmes can liberate women against violence were displayed in Table 1. The results showed that all item statements numbers 1-6, had mean scores that are over 2.50. This indicates that female adult education learners agreed that literacy programmes is capable of liberating women against violence by boosting women's leadership skills and access to decision-making positions, earning women economic independence, make women gain access to the right information that would enable them to

get out of abusive domestic relationships, place women in position to discourage early marriage as it concerns their daughters, increase the awareness of women in the rural areas of every form of oppression and helped women become more aware of sensitive issues like gender-based violence in families and also, women's rights.

Hypothesis 1: There is no appreciable distinction between the mean responses of female adult learners from rural and urban areas on how literacy programmes can liberate women against violence.

Table 2: t-test analysis of difference in respondents' perception on how literacy programmes can liberate women against violence

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	std	t-cal	Df	P-value	Remark
Rural	220	3.15	0.50	14.10	346	0.00	Sig.
Urban	128	2.60	0.29				

\bar{X} \bar{X} = Mean; std = Standard Deviation; t-critical = 1.96; t-cal = t- calculated value; N = Number of respondents for each category; df = Degrees of freedom; Sig = Significant at 0.05 level; NS = Not significant.

By comparing respondents' perceptions on how literacy programmes can liberate women against violence, this hypothesis was examined using an independent sample t-test. The mean reaction varied significantly between female Adults from rural (\bar{X} \bar{X} = 3.15, SD = 0.50) and urban (\bar{X} \bar{X} = 2.60, SD = 0.29) areas and at the 0.05 level of significance, t-cal (346) = 14.10, p = 0.00. This conclusion led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. As a result, the different responders have different perceptions about how literacy programmes can liberate women against violence.

Consequently, null hypothesis one was disproved.

Research Question 2: How can literacy programmes liberate women against widowhood?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of respondents' replies to items on how literacy programmes can liberate women against widowhood

S/N	Items:	X	Std	Remark
1	Literacy education can help broaden the mind as well as enhance the confidence building tool of illiterate widows in rural areas	2.94	0.95	Agreed
2	Through literacy instruction, widows can acquire the ability to evaluate incongruous events and ideals that exist in their community.	2.77	0.76	Agreed
3	Literacy programmes gave women's groups the livelihood skills they needed to raise their families' standards of living	2.56	0.65	Agreed
4	Literacy programmes empower women with some level of independence, and access to markets and credit	3.14	0.89	Agreed

Note: \bar{X} \bar{X} = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, N = Number of Respondents = 605

Table 3 shows that all items had mean scores over 2.50, indicating that female adult education learners recognized the entire item claims as how literacy programmes can liberate women against widowhood.

Research question 3: How can literacy programmes liberate women against gender discrimination?

Table 4: Mean of standard deviation of responses of the respondents on how literacy programmes can liberate women against gender discrimination

S/N	Items:	\bar{X}	std	Remark
1	Information that would raise gender consciousness is often stored in the written form and can only be accessed if the women have the necessary literacy skills.	2.70	0.97	Agreed
2	Through literacy education, every form of cultural and traditional relegation would be overcome by women	2.97	0.98	Agreed
3	Through literacy programmes, women would be able to read and understand and control their world	2.50	0.60	Agreed
4	Literacy education would for instance enable rural women to recognize and question for example, the sources of their oppression.	2.97	0.79	Agreed

5	Literacy programme empower women so as to alter their marginalized conditions	3.11	0.84	Agreed
6	Every form of social barrier limiting women can be overcome through literacy education	3.04	0.81	Agreed
7	Women participation in civic life can be encouraged by exposing them to literacy education	2.67	0.96	Agreed

Note: \bar{X} = Mean, std = Standard Deviation, N = Number of Respondents = 605

The finding in Table 4 reveals that female adult education learners thought that items 1 through 7 were the best ways through which literacy programmes can liberate women against gender discrimination ($\bar{X} > 2.50$).

Hypothesis 2: There is no appreciable distinction between the mean responses of female adult learners from rural and urban areas on how literacy programmes can liberate women against gender discrimination

Table 2: t-test analysis of difference in respondents' perception on how literacy programmes can liberate women against gender discrimination

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	Std	t-cal	df	P-value	Remark
Rural	220	3.03	0.41	10.49	346	0.00	Sig.
Urban	128	2.54	0.42				

\bar{X} = Mean; std = Standard Deviation; t-critical = 1.96; t-cal = t-calculated value; N = Number of respondents for each category; df = Degrees of freedom; Sig = Significant at 0.05 level; NS = Not significant.

By comparing difference in respondents' perception on how literacy programmes can liberate women against gender discrimination, this hypothesis was examined using an independent sample t-test. The mean reaction varied significantly between female adult learners from rural ($\bar{X} = 3.03$, $SD = 0.41$) and urban ($\bar{X} = 2.54$, $SD = 0.42$) areas at the 0.05 level of significance, t-cal (346) = 10.49, $p = 0.00$. This conclusion led the researchers to fail to accept the null hypothesis. As a result, the different responders have different perception on how literacy programmes can liberate women against gender discrimination. Consequently, null hypothesis two was disproved.

Discussion

According to this survey results, a literacy programme is a viable tool for liberating women from every form of violence in the present day. Literacy programmes are capable of boosting women's leadership skills and elevating them to decision-making positions, as well as earning them some level of economic independence. This will go a long way towards helping them gain some level of independence. This result is consistent with what was discovered by Thingbaijam (2021), who reported that adult literacy equipped women with new skills, upgraded their old skills, acquainted them with ways and means of utilizing the provisions made in different schemes and projects, informed them of procedures for getting assistance from credit institutions and cooperatives, and such enabled them to get out of abusive relationships. From the exposure gained, women will also be in a better position to make informed decisions concerning marriage and the future of their daughters. Literacy programmes are also capable of raising the awareness of women in rural areas about every form of oppression and helping them become more aware of sensitive issues like gender-based violence in families and women's rights.

The study discovered that literacy programmes helped women suffering from being widows gain freedom by assisting them in expanding their minds and boosting their confidence. The amount of confidence widows acquired as a result of literacy programmes allowed them to develop the abilities necessary to test contradicting situations and ideals that existed in their community. In addition to being given the confidence to stand up for themselves, widows also gained some of the skills necessary for a livelihood to raise the standard of living for their

families, a certain amount of independence, and access to markets and credit. This result supports earlier findings by Dixon-Mueller (1993), whose study found that education and media exposure give widows more power by giving them the knowledge and tools they need to live successfully. Financial freedom, access to and integration into political systems apart from their kinship networks, and media exposure are all important in today's society.

According to the study's findings, literacy programmes are helping to close the gender gap. Every type of cultural and traditional oppression against women would be overcome through literacy education. Women could read, understand, and have control over their environment through literacy programmes. By doing so, they will change their marginalized circumstances and remove every type of social barrier preventing them from taking part in civic life.

An independent sample t-test of respondents' perceptions on how literacy programmes can liberate women against violence differed by location. Similarly, an independent sample t-test of respondents' perception on how literacy programmes can liberate women against gender violence differed by location. This indicated that literacy programmes had more impact on women in the rural areas than women in the urban areas.

Conclusion

Literacy programme is a viable tool for liberating women from every form of violence, widowhood, and gender discrimination. It achieves this by empowering women with numeracy skills, livelihood skills, leadership skills, and information on how to gain access to markets and credit. Literacy programmes also raised women's awareness of sensitive issues like gender-based violence in families and women's rights. Through literacy programmes, women were able to alter their marginalised conditions and break free from every form of social barrier limiting their participation in civic life.

Recommendations

Adult literacy initiatives should be supported and promoted by the government and other stakeholders. In this way, more women from all walks of life will be liberated from all forms of subjugation, especially those living in rural areas.

More effective measures are required in this direction to give women access to entrepreneurial awareness, different orientations, and skill development programmes through the adult education programme so that adult women learners can also have an equal opportunity to enter the world of entrepreneurship beyond their improvement in living and earning conditions.

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