

REFORMS FOR MEETING THE 21ST CENTURY NEEDS OF ADULT LITERACY LEARNERS IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent to which education reforms can help meet the 21st needs of adult literacy learners in Enugu State, Nigeria. The study was conducted in various literacy centers in Enugu State, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study. The study made use of descriptive survey research design. The population was 569 facilitators of literacy programmes. There was no sampling since the population is of manageable size. Semi-structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Cronbach Alpha method was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire and an overall reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained. Data generated were analyzed using mean and standard deviation while regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Results of the study revealed that skills such as literacy in arts and creativity, financial literacy, media literacy, eco-literacy, cyber-literacy, social and emotional literacy, physical fitness and health literacy, initiative and entrepreneurialism skills, and oral and written communication skills are the skills that will empower adult learners to function effectively, create positive change, and thrive in a globalised world. Curriculum reforms improved literacy learning of adults to a high extent, so also are the reforms in the evaluation systems. It is therefore, recommended among others that Continuing professional development programmes should be organized at state and local government levels in order to equip the facilitators with the needed knowledge and skills for greater outputs.

Keywords: Education Reforms; 21st century Needs; Adult Literacy Learners

Introduction

In this twenty-first century, there are numerous changes happening in all facets of the society. Compared to previous centuries, some of these changes are happening more frequently and at a much faster rate. Some of the changes include migration across racial and/or national boundaries, increases displaced people, environmental changes due to global warming, poverty, social unrest, and population explosions, particularly in developing countries. Additionally, science and technology, knowledge generation, human belief patterns, and social values of both individuals and groups have advanced. This has created numerous challenges that needs to be addressed by the educational systems of all nations. It is a well-known fact that educational institutions act as an organ of socialization and assume the enormous task of training individuals who proffer solutions to the emerging needs in society to meet the resulting emerging challenges (Okogbaa, 2017).

Even though education acts as an agent of socialization, its position depends largely on well-driven policies of the government, one that can bring about educational change (Okemakinde & Olajide, 2023). According to Alabi (2010), education reforms are deliberate initiatives to alter educational systems or programmes in an effort to address alleged social and educational issues. Adeniyi (2010), defined educational reforms as government-directed programmes of

educational change that are developed based on political analysis and justified by the need for a significant break from current practice. Going by the above definitions, education reform is the intentional modification of educational systems and programmes with the aim of improving educational outcomes, increase access and equity in education for all adults, regardless of background, prior educational attainment, or location and promoting lifelong learning.

In Nigeria, Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN] (2014) establishes the principles that govern the government's actions regarding education. Since its inception in 1977, the policy has been revised four times, with updates taking place in 1981, 1998, 2004, and 2014. Section 6 and Article 32 of the policy, mandates the provision of mass literacy, adult literacy, and non-formal education to basically encourage functional literacy for youths and adults outside formal education so as to equip them with the necessary knowledge, skills and values with which to better their living standard and that of their society in general (FRN, 2014).

Adult literacy as a component of literacy programmes equips youths and adults with the literacy programme that helps people learn the fundamentals of reading, writing, computing simple arithmetic, communicating in a known language(s), thereby improving their personal lives (Egbezor & Okanezi, 2008). According to Ihejirika (2011), adult literacy programme is an educational programme that is widely acknowledged as a key tool for tackling issues like gender discrimination, disease, illiteracy, poverty, and national development. Building on the established understanding of adult literacy, adult literacy is defined as the ability of adults to use reading, writing, numeracy, and communication skills to access, understand, and utilize information from various sources in their daily lives, communicate effectively with others in spoken and written forms, solve problems encountered in personal and professional settings and continue learning throughout their lives to adapt to a changing world.

No educational system can excel above the calibre of its instructors, as is widely acknowledged (FRN, 2004). In the same vein, Rathi (2015) reiterates that no society can be more dynamic than its educational system, and no educational system can be more dynamic than its teachers. The author maintained that, the calibre of the educators who carry out educational programmes determines the effectiveness of the educational systems. This claim demonstrates how important facilitators are as regards the effective and efficient provision of adult literacy programmes are to the accomplishment of any educational programme. It therefore follows that the success of adult literacy programmes hinges not only on well-designed curricula and clear policy mandates, but also on the dedication and expertise of facilitators. Just as the quality of an educational system relies on its teachers, effective adult literacy programmes depend on skilled facilitators who can create engaging learning environments and cater to the diverse needs of adult learners.

For literacy programs to be effective, well-designed educator preparation programs are a prerequisite. Educator's preparation programmes are a specialized curriculum designed for educators in providing the knowledge and skills necessary for them to implement effective curricula in their own classrooms (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE] (2020). Key components of such curricula include mastery in subject matter, instructional methods and strategies that will be used for instruction among others (Fink, 2013). Supporting these assertions, Okogbaa (2017) argued that a strong emphasis should be placed on subject matter mastery and offer plenty of chances for facilitators and students to spend time in actual classroom settings while being supervised by an accomplished mentor (Okogbaa, 2017). Additionally, AACTE (2010) suggested that educators should be prepared to work together to help students acquire the knowledge and skills of the twenty-first century so that

they are prepared to participate fully in a vibrant and civil society, meet the demands of the global economy, and practice good citizenship. International Literacy Association (2016) supported the stance of AACTE (2010), by stating that reform proposals pertaining to literacy teaching and facilitators must pay close attention to facilitator's preparation programmes, the recruitment and retention of effective literacy educators, and facilitator's evaluation systems. In other words, the effectiveness of adult literacy programmes hinges not only on the skills and dedication of facilitators, but also on the quality of their preparation. Educator preparation programmes must be rigorously evaluated to ensure they equip facilitators with the necessary subject-matter expertise, provide ample opportunities for supervised classroom practice, and foster collaboration in developing 21st-century skills for learners. By regularly assessing and refining these programmes, facilitators will be empowered to guide adult learners towards functional literacy and equip them to contribute meaningfully to a vibrant and civil society.

The problems that the world is currently facing have made it necessary for learners to be prepared to live in 21st-century society; as a result, the skills they should possess must be those that are necessary for survival in the society they live in, especially for adults who demonstrate to be the leaders and builders of today. Consequently, adult education services must prioritize learner-centered approaches that connect learning opportunities to individual interests, experiences, and future aspirations. By fostering such relevance, adult education programmes can empower learners to become active contributors to a vibrant and evolving society (Ekuri, Betiang, Andong & Eyam, 2022). All attempts to provide adult learners with an education that is not pertinent to their current needs may seem futile, because they are burdened already with family and work obligations. Therefore, adult educators are to be able to adapt to changing circumstances, and adult education policies should be grounded in current events. Because of this, development and training programmes for educators will need to be updated to reflect the ever-changing needs of learners in the twenty-first century. To this end, the present study examined the impact of literacy reforms on adult educators for meeting literacy-learning needs in the 21st century in Enugu State.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of the study is to investigate the extent to which education reform can help meet the 21st century needs of adult literacy learners in Enugu State. Specifically, the study examined

- extent to which facilitators' training can help meet the 21st century needs of adult literacy learners in Enugu State;
- extent to which curriculum reforms can help meet literacy learning of adults in Enugu State; and
- extent to which reforms in evaluation systems can help meet the 21st century needs of adult literacy learners in Enugu State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- To what extent can facilitators' training help meet the 21st century needs of adult literacy learners in Enugu State
- To what extent can curriculum reforms help meet literacy learning needs of adult literacy learners in Enugu State?
- To what extent have reforms in evaluation systems help meet the 21st century needs of adult literacy learners in Enugu State?

Methodology

The study made use of descriptive survey research design and was carried out in Enugu State, Nigeria. The population of the study was 569 facilitators comprising males and females. There was no sampling since the population is of manageable size. Semi-structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Semi-structured questionnaire was used in the study to allow for open-ended questions. This flexibility enables the researcher to gather richer data, delve deeper into unexpected responses that might not be captured by pre-determined answer choices. The questionnaire comprises of sections I and II. The respondents' personal information was supplied in Section I, while the objectives and research questions were divided into three clusters in Section II. Responses to the questionnaire items were based on a four-point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE) = 4, High Extent (HE) = 3, Low Extent (LE) = 2, to Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1. The instrument was face validated by three experts two from the Department of Adult Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit of Science Department all from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

To ensure the reliability of the instruments, a pilot study was carried out using 30 facilitators in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. A reliability coefficient of 0.78 was determined for the 26 items. Before the distribution and collection of the questionnaire, permission to administer the questionnaire at the various centers were obtained from the Head of Departments of the adult literacy centres. A written informed consent to conduct the study and duration of the survey was also given. This way, respondents avail themselves for the study. The researcher and one research assistant distributed and collected the questionnaire from the respondents at their respective adult literacy centers in Enugu State. The research assistant was briefed on the modalities for distributing and collecting the questionnaire from the respondents on the spot. This ensured that the questionnaires were appropriately completed by the respondents. 569 questionnaires were distributed to facilitators in this survey. All questionnaire distributed were duly returned, resulting in a response rate of 100 %.

The collected data underwent analysis using descriptive statistics, specifically means and standard deviations. Additionally, regression analysis was employed to test the formulated null hypotheses at a significance level of 0.05. Real limits of the mean score will be used for decision making thus: 0.50 – 1.49 is considered as 1 = Very Low Extent and weights of 1.50 – 2.49 is considered as 2 = Low Extent, weights of 2.50 – 3.49 is considered as 3 = High Extent, and weights of 3.50 – 4.00 is considered as 4 = Very High Extent. Null hypothesis was rejected if the *p*-value is less than 0.05, while it was upheld if *p*-value is greater than 0.05.

Results

Research Question One: To what extent can facilitators' training help meet the 21st century needs of adult literacy learners in Enugu State

Table 1: Mean with standard deviation responses of the respondents on extent to which facilitators' training can help meet the 21st century needs of adult literacy learners in Enugu State

S/N	Item statements:	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Literacy in arts and creativity	2.75	0.91	HE
2	Financial literacy	2.74	0.96	HE
3	Media literacy	2.78	0.94	HE
4	Eco-literacy	2.82	0.99	HE

5	Cyber-literacy	2.72	0.97	HE
6	Initiative and entrepreneurialism skill	2.91	0.84	HE
7	Oral and written communication skill	2.84	0.84	HE
8	Social and emotional literacy	2.67	0.87	HE
9	Physical fitness and health literacy	2.74	0.91	HE

Note: \bar{X} =Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, N = Number of Respondents=569, HE = High Extent

The data in Table 1, which addresses the research question 1, indicated that all the 9 items have their mean values above 2.50. This shows that all items statement are literacy skills needed in the 21st century.

Research Question Two: To what extent can curriculum reforms help meet literacy learning needs of adults in Enugu State?

Table 2: Mean with standard deviation responses of the respondents on extent to which curriculum reforms can help meet literacy learning of adults in Enugu State

S/N	Items statements:	X	SD	Decision
1	Regular provision of pre-service Adult Educators' with 21st-century literacy skills	2.96	0.94	HE
2	Preparatory programmes enriched with 21st century literacy skills	2.87	0.91	HE
3	Ongoing professional development	2.89	0.87	HE
4	Developmental programmes in the form of in-service	2.98	0.93	HE
5	Professional development programme that is experiential	3.07	0.88	HE

Note: \bar{X} =Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, N = Number of Respondents=569, HE = High Extent

From Table 2, it can be seen that curriculum reforms improved literacy learning of adults to a high extent ($\bar{X} > 2.50$). This goes to show that continual modification of the curriculum for adult educators is imperative for a successful teaching and learning of literacy skills.

Research Question Three: To what extent have reforms in evaluation systems help meet the 21st century needs of adult literacy learners in Enugu State?

Table 3: Mean with standard deviation responses of the respondents on the extent to which reforms in evaluation systems help meet the 21st century needs of adult literacy learners in Enugu State.

S/N	Item statements:	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Evaluation systems that identify professional development needs of Adult Educators	2.64	0.95	HE
2	Evaluation systems that assess the effectiveness of facilitators in the area of literacy teaching	2.92	0.97	HE
3	The use of structured evaluative performance kits enhanced literacy professional growth	3.07	0.87	HE

4	The regular evaluation of teaching and learning activities	2.77	0.91	HE
5	Periodical evaluation of facilitators and learners performance	3.08	0.75	HE

Note: \bar{X} =Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, N = Number of Respondents=569, HE= High Extent

The data in Table 3, which addresses the research question 3, indicated that all the 5 items have their mean values above 2.50. This shows that reforms in the evaluation systems for adult educators' affected literacy learning in Enugu State.

Discussion of Results

The results of this study revealed that literacy in arts and creativity, financial literacy, media literacy, eco-literacy, cyber-literacy, social and emotional literacy, physical fitness and health literacy, initiative and entrepreneurialism skills, and oral and written communication skills are literacy skills needed by adult learners in the 21st century. This finding is consistent with the findings of Okogbaa (2017), who found that learners of this contemporary time need literacy skills to function and create change personally, socially, emotionally, economically, politically, and technologically, on local, national and global levels. Adult learners need these skills because they will make them able to face the challenges of this global age. Of course, mastery of the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, are no longer sufficient for survival (Wagner, 2011).

The study discovered that modifications made in the preparatory programmes of Adult Educators improve literacy learning. In line with this finding, Akinbode and Abati (2019) reported that preparatory programmes in the form of teaching methods, teaching techniques and principles offered as courses, and teaching practice exercise undertaken by educators contributed to their teaching professional competency. In a similar vein, Eze, Nwoye, Odenigbo, and Uzoagulu (2023) found that the policies, guidelines, and practices put together to give aspiring adult educators the skills they need to succeed in their careers constitute the essence of teacher education. To emphasise this claim, regular provision of pre-service and in-service Adult Educators with knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach 21st-century literacy skills can make learners to become effective readers and writers. Supporting this finding, Yusuf (2017) observed that pre-service training exposes Adult Educators to new methods of teaching, new ideas, skills and knowledge in their careers, which subsequently improves their performance. Preparatory programmes enriched with 21st century literacy skills can help facilitators instill in learners the various competencies needed for successful living in this century. This is possible because competencies needed for successful living in the 21st century can be learned within a curriculum that is interdisciplinary, integrated, and project-based (Wagner, 2011). Ongoing professional development keeps facilitators up to date on new research on how to effectively use emerging technology and educational tools to instill in its learners' global competency skills such as the use of ICT, smart devices, etc. Developmental programmes in the form of in-service programmes, online courses, and other opportunities for collaboration with peers can instill in learners multicultural literacy skills. A professional development programme that is experiential can help facilitators instilled in learners a lifelong learning skill.

Further research results showed that evaluation systems greatly impacted literacy learning. A clear definition of the programme, its expected outcomes, and the deployment of means of measuring progress at every stage of the programme implementation can ensure programme success. Hence, evaluation systems that identify professional development needs of adult educators in the area of literacy, assesses the effectiveness of facilitators in the area of literacy

teaching, use structured evaluative performance kits, and periodically evaluates teaching and learning activities was found to impact literacy learning.

Regression analysis shows that changes made in the preparatory programmes for adult educators had positive effect on literacy learning ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, evaluation systems for adult educators positively affects literacy learning ($p < 0.05$). Based on the regression results, changes made in the preparatory programmes for adult educators had more impact on literacy learning.

Conclusion

The rapid changes in the 21st century require adult learners to possess a wider range of literacy skills beyond basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. These skills include literacy in arts and creativity, financial literacy, media literacy, eco-literacy, cyber-literacy, social and emotional literacy, physical fitness and health literacy, initiative and entrepreneurialism skills, and oral and written communication skills. These skills empower adult learners to function effectively, create positive change, and thrive in a globalised world. Curriculum reforms improved literacy learning of adults to a high extent. Ongoing professional development programmes focusing on 21st-century literacy skills significantly improve facilitators' ability to teach these skills to adult learners. This was possible because the curriculum incorporates interdisciplinary, integrated, and project-based learning approaches contribute to effective literacy learning. Implementing clear evaluation systems that assess both facilitator performance and learner progress positively impact literacy learning outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Continuing professional development programmes should be organized at state and local government levels in order to equip the facilitators with the needed knowledge and skills for greater outputs.
2. There is need to regularly review and update the curriculum based on evolving needs and best practices in teaching and learning. This will ensure that the curriculum remains relevant and addresses the ever-changing needs of adult learners for effective result.
3. The development and implementation of clear evaluation systems using a combination of formative and summative assessments to identify strengths and weaknesses on the side of the learners and the facilitators. This will allow for timely adjustments and improvements in the programmes.

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