

Challenges and Strategies for Improvement in Participation of Adult Learners in Adult Literacy Centres, Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The main purpose of the study was to identify the challenges and strategies for improvement in participation of adult learners in Adult Literacy Centres, Anambra State, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised all the adult learners in Adult Literacy Centres, Awka South Local Government Area while the sample was 220 adult learners selected through purposive sampling technique. Questionnaire which was validated by two experts in Adult Education was the instrument for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was 0.86 obtained through Cronback Alpha. Data collected was analyzed with mean. Among the major findings of the study were that the challenges of adult learners' participation include conflict of occupation with education, ignorance, lack of teaching materials, lack of fund, old age, among others while the strategies include among others provision of conducive learning environment, flexible class schedule, counseling services. One of the recommendations includes that government should make provision for teaching materials in literacy centres.

Key words: Strategies, Adult learners, Participation, Literacy.

1. Introduction

Since the inception of man, learning has been a tool for positive change and development. Literacy as well has been a paramount arm of learning and it is therefore necessary to be undertaken by everyone, especially the adults who have lost the first chance of formal education. UNESCO Action Aids (2006) posited that literacy is all about acquiring and using reading writing and numeracy skills, which enable the development of active citizenship, improved health, livelihoods and gender equality. Fransman (2008) stated that literacy has been internationally recognized as a crucial instrument for the pursuit of human rights and other necessary human needs.

Literacy for life reinforces the learner self perception. Barton (2007) points out that literacy contributes to societal progress and broadens other patterns of development and therefore gives way to great achievements. It is not enough for an adult learner to be able to read, write and calculate without the application of these skills acquired in literacy to his daily family and societal needs. Literacy should be used by adult learners to shape their destiny for self-discovery and fulfillment of communal aspirations. Adult learners utilize literacy for better information on world affairs and societal improvements like participation in local political, effective reasoning and contributions in the development of their country. In fact, literacy is a key that unlocks the door of education.

It has been observed that high adult enrolled rates and low dropout rates in the adult literacy programmes are very vital towards wiping out adult illiteracy while low enrolment rates and high dropout rates on the other hand limit progress in adult literacy. This is in line with Fasokun and Pwol (2008) who affirmed that poor enrolment rate in adult literacy programmes and high dropout rates are prevalent in Nigeria and that they are contributory to literacy setback in Nigeria as well. Also, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), (2008) stated that none of the literacy efforts attempted in Nigeria so far has produced the desired results and that many adults still do not have access to literacy education because of lack of effective education policies. This agrees with the view of Oluchi (2005) that, over the years, there has been concern that the adult literacy programmes which once thrived well have presently been doing badly. Such programmes are now low keyed, ineffective and characterized by poor participation by adult literacy learners. Adult learners are those who engage themselves in any learning activity with the intent of solving their problems.

Unfortunately, the negative situations of high dropout rates and low enrolment rates have lowered the level of adult literacy in Nigeria and particularly in Anambra State. This is in agreement with Anambra State Agency for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education, Awka (2008) that the efforts made so far to eradicate adult illiteracy in the State have not yielded the desired fruits. There was a sharp drop in adult literacy participation in 2008 in Anambra State resulting to 11,995 participants as against the 27,661 participants in 2007. This fluctuation may be caused by inadequate motivational strategies which has eventually created gap that needs to be bridged. Strategies here mean plans that are intended to achieve a particular purpose or goal.

In response to the literacy setbacks, Sussmuth (2009) stated that adult illiteracy is a continuing and the most prevailing issue to which this generation should not close their eyes. The author further stated that illiteracy is presently on the increase not only in the developing countries but also in some of the developed (industrialized) countries with about 6% of adult illiterate populations. Going by the above assertion, there is a strong fear that it might be hard to wipe out illiteracy within a scope of ten years. It is possible that if adequate motivational strategies are employed, the challenges of adult learners would be ameliorated, hence the need for this study.

2. Research Questions

Two research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What are the challenges militating against adult learners' participation in Adult Literacy Centres in Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State?
2. What are the strategies for improving adult learners' participation in Adult Literacy Centres in Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State?

3. Methods and Materials

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Two research questions guided the study. The population of the study consisted of all the adult learners in Adult Literacy Centres, Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State. The sample of the study was 220 adult learners selected through purposive sampling technique. Questionnaire which was validated by two experts in Adult Education was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha coefficient and 0.86 was obtained and was adjudged highly enough. A criterion mean of 2.5 was adopted. This implies that items within

the mean of 2.5 and above were agreed while those below 2.5 were disagreed. The mean scores were also ranked from the highest to the lowest.

4. Results

Table 1: Mean scores of the adult learners on the challenges militating against their participation in Adult Literacy Centres.

S/N	Challenges	Mean	Rank
1.	Conflict of occupation with education.	3.71	1st
2.	Ignorance of what the programme could offer/Lack of motivation.	3.65	2nd
3.	Lack of teaching materials and facilities.	2.94	8th
4.	Attitude of educators/facilitators.	2.81	9th
5.	Lack of counseling services.	3.41	6th
6.	Lack of fund.	3.56	4th
7.	Ageing/old age.	3.61	3rd
8.	Health related problems.	3.20	7th
9.	Cultural barriers.	2.75	11th
10.	Domestic chores.	2.80	10th
11.	Low self-esteem/confidence.	3.43	5th
12.	Low retentive memory.	2.52	14th
13.	Disability-physical, learning, sight, learning etc.	2.60	12th
14.	Poor teachers' training.	2.56	13th

Table 1 revealed that all the items 1-14 were agreed on by the respondents. This was because all the means were above 2.5 which is the criterion mean. This implies that all the items are challenges militating against adult learners' participation in Adult Literacy Centres.

Table 2: Mean scores of the adult learners on the strategies for improving their participation in Adult Literacy Centres.

S/N	Strategies	Mean	Rank
1.	Making provision for conclusive learning environment.	3.52	1st
2.	Making class schedule flexible.	3.01	3rd
3.	Training and retraining of educators.	2.86	5th
4.	Provision for counseling services.	2.98	4th
5.	Use of adequate teaching/instructional materials.	2.81	7th
6.	Maintaining cordial relationship with learners.	2.62	9th
7.	Mounting campaign on the need for adult literacy.	3.51	2nd
8.	Evaluation/supervision of instruction by government.	2.54	12th
9.	Communicating the learners on their performances.	2.70	8th
10.	Recruiting of qualified personnel.	2.84	6th
11.	Paying of educators/facilitators allowances as at when due.	2.71	10th

12.	Networking in Adult education.	2.58	11th
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Table 2 equally revealed that all the items 1-12 were agreed on by the respondents. This was because all the means were above the criterion mean of 2.5, which implies that they are strategies for improving adult learners' participation in Adult Literacy Centres.

5. Discussion

The result in table 1 revealed that a number of challenges militate against adult learners' participation in Adult Literacy Centres. The problems range from conflict of occupation with education to poor teachers' training. This is in agreement with Obi (2006) that low motivation in adult literacy project has been one of the major problems militating against effective adult literacy education in Nigeria. This low motivation cuts across the totality of the society. Low motivation is reflected in a number of ways which include:

1. Unsuitable reading, writing and calculating materials used in Adult Literacy Centres;
2. Low priority attached to the project by almost all the successive administrators in Nigeria, as reflected in the meager funds made available to the project;
3. The unattractive career structure and prospect for the personnel;
4. Low rate of participation and high rate of drop-out from the project by the participants and the instructors;
5. Poor learning environment.

This also agrees with Olejede (2012) who identified the following as factors that affect the learners' willingness to participate in literacy activities:

1. Individual, family or home-related problems.
2. Cost concerns-questionable worth, relevance or quality of available educational opportunities.
3. Negative perceptions of the value of education in general.
4. Lack of motivation or indifference toward learning.
5. Lack of self-confidence in one's learning abilities.
6. A general tendency towards non-affiliation.
7. Incompatibilities of time and/or place.

Corroborating with this, Khan (2009) asked questions on how adult literacy has fared in Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (2005) and observed a large teaching gap

in adult literacy with many contract staff who are poorly qualified, poorly paid with very low job security and prospect. Khan plainly stated that there are no figure for the gaps in number of adult literacy facilitators in adult education personnel and trainers.

The result in table 2 showed a number of motivational strategies that work when they are employed. Such strategies have worked in some areas depending on the situation in a given environment. This is in conformity with Fasokun and Powl (2008) that adult learners in Nigeria struggle with family expenses and where they have financial and psychological motivations, they continue with literacy learning but where these vital motivational components are lacking, the adult learners find it difficult to change their behaviour. This also agrees with Fransman (2008) who observed that the success of adult literacy lies mostly in a motivating, dynamic and stimulating environment added to the facilitators' appropriate methodology in the delivery of the literacy programmes. In the same vein, Susmith (2009) stated that UNESCO CONFINTEA 2009 in Brazil suggested that more of the educational funds (about 6%) should be set for achieving adult literacy competencies which include training facilitators who have direct interaction with the adult literacy learners and are responsible for teaching them effectively.

Also, Nwankwo (1998) stipulated that for learning to be effective, learning materials should be made available in order to enhance learning. The author recommended that suitable, appropriate and relevant textbooks, library materials like magazines, newspapers etc audio-visual materials including pictures, slides, film strips, radio, television, maps, charts etc are needed to concretize the ideas and stimulate imagination.

6. Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that the low participation of adult learners in literacy centres is caused by a number of factors ranging from conflict of occupation with education to poor teachers' training. This low participation is attributed to lack of adequate motivation strategies to conscientize the adult learners, who have full-time jobs and responsibilities in their families. Adequate motivation is very vital for illiterate adults bordered with family and community problems to undertake and continue with literacy learning and be punctual in attendance to classes. It is, therefore, expected that if the motivational strategies proffered are adequately employed, the deterioration in participation of adult learners in literacy classes will be reversed.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government should make provision for teaching materials in literacy centres that will be utilized by instructors/facilitators to concretize learning. This should be done in a conducive learning environment that stimulates learning.
2. The Agency for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education, Anambra State should intensify efforts in creating awareness to the public on the need for adult literacy. This will help to re-awaken the adults who still have stigma, superstitions and low self esteem about adult education.
3. The government should periodically organize seminars and workshops for adult instructors/facilitators to abreast them with the current theories and practices in adult education. The government should equally recruit qualified personnel to handle the delivery of instruction in adult literacy programme.
4. There is also the need for the instructors to communicate the learners on their performances. This will motivate them as they see the outcome of their participation in education activities.
5. Counseling should be integrated into adult education in Nigeria Higher Institutions. This is to expose the adult literacy personnel to the skills of counseling adult learners during their training

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