

Enhancing Women's Participation in Literacy Education Programmes in Niger State

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine ways of enhancing women's participation in literacy education programmes in Niger State. Five research questions were raised to achieve the objectives of the study. The study adopted the ex-post facto research design. The population of the study consists of two hundred and thirty-two (232) registered adult learners in three (3) literacy centres in Kotangora local government area of Niger State. The sample for the study consists of two hundred and thirty-two (232) registered adult learners in three (3) literacy centres in Kotangora local government area of Niger State. This study made use of a self-constructed close-ended questionnaire. The validity of the instrument was determined using the face and content validity approach while the test re-test reliability approach was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. Data from the study were analysed using mean, frequency count and simple percentage. Findings from the study revealed that basic, advanced and functional literacy programmes are available for women, women's participation in literacy education programmes can be enhanced through increased awareness creation, flexibility of programme, employment of female facilitators, free literacy books, Husbands permitting their wives to go literacy classes, and making literacy programmes compulsory for women. In view of the findings and conclusions from the study, it was recommended amongst others that literacy centre managers and facilitators should embark on wide-reaching awareness campaigns through different groups like traditional rulers, religious leaders and market places.

Keywords: Adult learners, Literacy, Women participation, Literacy education programmes

Introduction

Literacy has been identified as one of the adult education programmes that provides the recipients with requisite knowledge and skills. It is necessary and indispensable for economic, social, political and technological, growth and advancement of any society. In other words, literacy provides the foundation upon which other levels of education and societal development are built. This is why UNESCO in Oladapo (2016) considers literacy as a human right and an essential ingredient for achieving equality, development and peace. Literacy is the ability to read, write and

compute. Literacy is considered a right, and an essential that adds value to a person's life. Literacy is of three forms, namely, basic, advanced and functional literacy. Basic literacy skills are referred to as the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, three Rs. Individuals need to possess these skills, to carry out various tasks and activities and appropriately sustain their living conditions.

According to Okukpon (2021), acquisition of literacy is the ability to read and write with understanding a simple sentence about their daily activities. This implies that literacy makes one able to plan his or her daily activities by writing them out and probably following them sequentially to a logical conclusion. Basic literacy skills are regarded as an indispensable component of human resource development. It is fundamental to not only the growth and development of human resources but also to lead to social and economic progress of the nation.

Advanced literacy refers to skills and competencies that enable communication in increasingly diverse ways and promote the understanding and use of text for a variety of purposes. It focuses on the new role that language and literacy skills take in society, in the neighbourhoods and the global world and what this means for classroom instruction. Today's learners need to develop increasingly sophisticated literacy skills to thrive day-to-day; they need to communicate in increasingly diverse ways and with increasingly diverse audiences. Similarly, the ability of an individual to improve his or her quality of life, make informed decisions, and continue learning in all those activities for which literacy skills are required is regarded as functional literacy. It refers to the usage of literacy skills in all of an individual's activities in such a way as to improve or advance his or her present condition and that of the society where he or she lives. Functional literacy is essential because it enables the one who has acquired it to function properly in society. With particular reference to women, functional literacy helps her to effectively carry out the dual role of a mother and teacher (Okukpon, 2021).

Generally, literacy is a significant tool for the enhancement of the living conditions of individuals. This means that literacy can be used for both men's and women's societal empowerment. Women's empowerment through their participation in literacy programmes, can build on poor people's strengths to solve problems and manage resources, gain knowledge, skills and values and, rise out of poverty. Literacy for women means they will learn the importance of taking care of themselves and their families. Their coming together at literacy classes provides a platform for them to share

their experiences as women. In the Northern part of Nigeria, many women especially married ones, are kept in purdah as a way of preventing any physical interaction between them and any other male figure apart from their husbands. This purdah system, though religiously and culturally acceptable, has prevented these women, most of whom were married at very tender ages, from having access to education. Providing literacy programmes to these categories of women can be a significant way to empower them so that they in turn can be of useful assistance to their children, their husbands and their immediate societies.

Literacy programmes have contributed to women's empowerment in different facets of life. Economic empowerment through literacy would make it possible for women to have the choice of ways in which to support themselves and their families. Educated women are more likely to enter paid jobs than uneducated ones. They are also more receptive to new ideas regarding strategies and methods. Accordingly, Nordquist (2016) posited that the participation of women in the national literacy campaign has opened several opportunities for new literate women to step out of households and involve themselves in some enterprise or a new vocation.

Literacy programme helps women change their attitudes, behaviours and styles of communication. They have become efficient, and confident and actively participate in various public activities. More importantly, they can move beyond the limited realm of the household. A literate woman stands a better chance in personal and family health attention. This is because a mother's literacy level has positive effects on her child's development health and mortality rate. An educated woman is known to be less at risk since she is more likely to seek health care and improve her living conditions. In addition, she is aware of most of the societal ills that affect her age group by virtue of her ability to, read and write (Umar, 2017).

The realization that adult literacy has the potential to improve women's involvement and contribution to national development has motivated governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals to subscribe to adult literacy, for empowerment purposes. However, the level of participation of adult learners in literacy programmes in developing countries especially women has been declining over the years. The reasons for the decline in women enrolment according to Ekundayo (2022), include low facilitator motivation due to poor remuneration resulting in irregularity in class attendance, lack of teaching and learning materials,

lack of income-generating activities and inadequate training of part-time facilitators. Umar (2017) argued that women are also discouraged by the attitude of men who do not want them to attend literacy programmes. Husbands and guardians sometimes forbid women to participate in any programme perhaps because they are afraid that if women learn as much as or more than them, their ignorance may be exposed. This is a typical explanation of the plight of women in Niger State.

Niger State, like many States in Nigeria, is a patriarchal society with prevalent male dominance and recognised traditional roles for women. For instance, women are traditionally expected to take care of their husbands, and children, prepare meals for the family and ensure cleanliness and orderliness of the home. Similarly, women are also victims of high levels of gender inequality in every facet of national life. This is evident in employment opportunities where the males seem to be more favoured than their female counterparts. In the political sector, male candidates are mostly preferred to females, and appointments most times favour the males because the number of male appointees is always far higher than the female appointees, even political meetings are structured to systemically discourage women from participating. For instance, most political meetings of significant importance are held at night. This makes it difficult for women to participate.

Kenrick, Neuberg, Griskevicius, Berker, and Schaller, (2020) posit that women in Niger state have to contend with a heavy workload, poor attitude of men towards their quest to acquire literacy, and vocational skills. Niger State has a high illiteracy rate because they are often denied access to education because of poverty, early marriages, and the patriarchal nature of the society that expects a woman to remain perpetually “under the control” of her father as a child and, later, her husband as a wife. Although Niger State has experienced political changes with attendant changes in policy direction especially in the area of increase in support and motivation for girl-child education, significant gains have not been recorded in solving the socio/economic problems of poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy coupled with the fact that women’s participation in literacy education programmes is still very low. Considering the avowed importance of literacy to societal development, there is a need to ensure that women’s participation and involvement in literacy

education are significantly increased. It is against this background that this study seeks to find out how women's participation in literacy education in Niger State can be enhanced.

The main purpose of the study was to find out how women's participation in literacy education programmes in Niger State can be enhanced. Specifically, the study seeks to ascertain the available literacy education programmes for women in Niger State, find out how women in Niger State view literacy education programmes earmarked for them, investigate the level of awareness about literacy education programmes for women, explore how women's participation in literacy education programmes in Niger State can be enhanced and lastly, determine the problems encountered by women while participating in literacy education programmes in Niger State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study

1. What are the available literacy education programmes for women in Niger State?
2. How do women in Niger State view literacy education programmes earmarked for them?
3. What is the level of awareness about literacy education programmes for women in Niger State?
4. How can women's participation in literacy education programmes in Niger State be enhanced?
5. What are the problems encountered by women while participating in literacy education programmes in Niger State?

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. This design was chosen because it enables the researcher to obtain accurate information for large numbers of population using a small sample. A survey design was preferred because it concerns itself with describing practices to determine the current status of that population with regard to one or more variables. The usefulness of this design was convenient in collecting extensive quantifiable data from a large sample of respondents within a short period of time. The population of the study consisted of all women in Kotangora local government area of Niger State. The sample for the study consists of two hundred

and thirty-two (232) registered adult learners in three (3) literacy centres in Kotangora local government area of Niger State. The sampling was done using the census sampling technique because the population size is very small and can be properly managed.

A self-constructed close-ended questionnaire titled “Enhancing Women Participation in Literacy Education Programmes” (EWPLEP) was used for data collection. The questionnaire, (EWPLEP) was divided into two (2) sections with a total of twenty-five (25) item statements. Section A contains four (3) item statements which are meant to elicit demographic information about the respondents such as age, marital status and religion. Section B was made up of twenty (20) items meant to obtain information from items raised in the research questions. Responses were assessed using the modified Likert scale of Strongly Agreed (4), Agreed (3), Disagreed (2) and strongly Disagreed (1).

The validity of the instrument was determined using the face and content validity approach. In this case, the instrument was subjected to experts in educational research. Their comments and corrections were considered in the final production of the instrument. The test re-test reliability approach was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. In this regard, the instrument was administered twice to a group of ten (10) respondents who were not part of the sample for the study. This was done within an interval of two weeks. The responses obtained from the two sets of data were collated and correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics to obtain the reliability index. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation statistical tools. Mean benchmark for decision making for the research questions was 2.50. This means that items with a mean of 2.50 and above, were considered valid responses to the research questions, while items with mean scores below 2.50 were seen as not adequate to be responses to the research questions for the study.

Results

The analyses of research questions 1 to 5 are presented in the Tables below

Research Question One: What are the available literacy education programmes for women in Niger State?

Table 1: Distribution of Responses on the Available Literacy Education Programmes for Women

S/N	Items	Mean	Remark
1.	Identification of letters of the alphabet	2.53	Agreed
2.	Writing of letters of the alphabet	2.55	Agreed
3.	Combination of Letters	2.66	Agreed
4.	Pronouncing words	2.65	Agreed
5.	Simple Arithmetic	2.53	Agreed
6.	Discussion in English Language	2.56	Agreed
7.	Reading of textbooks	2.50	Agreed
8.	Letter writing	2.51	Agreed
9.	Completing forms	2.50	Agreed
10.	Filling of bank tellers	2.50	Agreed

Data in Table 1 shows that all the items met the criterion mean and so were agreed as the available literacy education programmes for women. It can be seen that the women are taught how to identify letters of the alphabet, writing of letters of the alphabet, a combination of letters, pronouncing words, simple arithmetic, discussion in English language, reading of text books, letter writing, completing forms, and filling of bank tellers. This means that the basic, advanced and functional literacy programmes are available for women

Research Question Two: How do women in Niger State view literacy education programmes earmarked for them?

Table 2: Distribution of Responses on how Women in Niger State View Literacy Education Programmes Earmarked for them

S/N	Items	Mean	Remark
1.	Literacy programmes have been very helpful	2.53	Agreed
2.	I have learnt how to read small books	2.54	Agreed
3.	I can do simple calculations	2.52	Agreed
4.	My level of communication has improved	2.55	Agreed
5.	I have not benefitted from literacy programmes	1.32	Not Agreed
6.	I am able to help my children with their schoolwork	2.50	Agreed
7.	Literacy has enabled me to manage my business better	2.51	Agreed
8.	My financial contribution to my family has improved	2.53	Agreed
9.	Literacy programme has made me more confident of myself	2.51	Agreed
10.	Attending literacy programmes is a waste of time	1.00	Not Agreed

Data in Table 2 shows that items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9 met the criterion mean of 2.50 and so were agreed as women's view literacy education programmes earmarked for them while items 5 and 10 did not meet the criterion mean and so were not accepted. It can be seen from the Table that the women indicated that Literacy programmes have been very helpful, they have learnt how to read small books and do simple calculations. Literacy programmes have also improved their level of communication, made them able to help their children with their school works, manage their business better, improved their financial contribution to their families and make them more confident of themselves. This means that women in Niger State have a positive view of the literacy programme provided for them.

Research Question Three: What is the level of awareness about literacy education programmes for women in Niger State?

Table 3: Distribution of Responses on the Level of Awareness about Literacy Education Programmes for Women

Level	Frequency	Percentage
High	32	13.8
Moderate	48	20.7
Low	152	65.5
Total	232	100

Data in Table 3 shows that 32 or 13.8% of the sampled respondents are highly aware of literacy programmes for women, 48 or 20.7% of them are moderately aware, while 152 or 65.5% of them are not really aware. This means that the level of awareness about literacy education programmes for women is low

Research Question Four: How can women's participation in literacy education programmes in Niger State be enhanced?

Table 4: Distribution of Responses on how Women's Participation in Literacy Education Programmes in Niger State can be Enhanced

S/N	Items	Mean	Remark
1.	More awareness of the literacy programmes should be created	2.50	Agreed
2.	Literacy programmes should be made flexible	2.51	Agreed
3.	More female facilitators should be employed in literacy centres	2.50	Agreed
4.	Literacy books should be given free of charge	2.56	Agreed
5.	Husbands should be made to allow their wives to go to literacy classes	2.54	Agreed
6.	Literacy programmes should be made compulsory for women	2.52	Agreed

Data in Table 4 shows that all the items met the criterion mean of 2.50 and so were agreed as the ways through which women's participation in literacy education programmes in Niger State can be enhanced. This means that women's participation in literacy education programmes can be enhanced through increased awareness creation, flexibility of programmes, employment of female facilitators, free literacy books, Husbands permitting their wives to go to literacy classes, and making literacy programmes compulsory for women.

Research Question Five: What are the problems encountered by women while participating in literacy education programmes in Niger State?

Table 5: Distribution of Responses on the Problems Encountered by Women while Participating in Literacy Education Programmes

S/N	Items	Mean	Remark
1.	Literacy centres are far from my house	2.50	Agreed
2.	I am usually engaged in house chores	2.53	Agreed
3.	I don't really see literacy programmes as important	1.78	Not Agreed
4.	My husband does not allow me to go to the literacy centre	2.53	Agreed
5.	My literacy centre is not conducive	2.55	Agreed
6.	The furniture in my centre is too hard for adults	2.60	Agreed
7.	The facilitators are not regular at the centre	2.55	Agreed
8.	The facilitators do talk down on me	2.53	Agreed
9.	The facilitators always come late to the centre	1.50	Not Agreed
10.	The facilitators in my centre are mostly males	2.65	Agreed

It can be seen from Table 5 that, while items 3 and 9 did not meet the criterion mean of 2.50 and so were remarked not agreed, items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10 met the criterion mean and were remarked agreed. This means that the problems encountered by women while participating in literacy education programmes are lack of home-centre proximity, house chores, husband factor, unconducive literacy centre, inappropriate furniture, irregular facilitators, disrespect from facilitators, and predominant male facilitators

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the study were very revealing. In the first place, findings from the study revealed that that the basic, advanced and functional literacy programmes are available for women.

This is in line with the overall objective of literacy which is to make the individual not just capable of reading, writing and calculating, but also to use them to affect their daily lives. Hence, Okukpon (2021), posited that literacy enables individual to read and write with an understanding of a simple sentence about their daily activities and makes one become able to plan his or her daily activities by writing them out and probably follow them sequentially to a logical conclusion.

Findings also revealed that women in Niger State have a positive view of the literacy programme provided for them. This finding is in agreement with Oyelami (2019) who found women in literacy centres to be very positively disposed towards the programme and are mobilizing fellow women to participate in it.

Again, findings from the study indicated that the level of awareness about literacy education programmes for women is low. This finding negates that of Oyelami (2019) who reported that there is a high level of awareness among women in various literacy centres. It also negates that of Obasi (2018) who found that women are conscious of literacy level and are aware of available literacy programmes.

Furthermore, it was seen from the findings from the study that women's participation in literacy education programmes can be enhanced through increased awareness creation, the flexibility of the programme, employment of female facilitators, free literacy books, husbands permitting their wives to go literacy classes, and making literacy programmes compulsory for women. This finding is related to that of Olomukoro and Adelore (2016) reported that there is a strong correlation between literacy education programmes and the socio-economic empowerment of women. Women had more access to loans and credit facilities for their economic activities thereby leading to higher income. Ways for enhancing participation in literacy programmes are to initiate guidance and counselling programmes and improve the economic activities of the learners.

Finally, findings from the study revealed that the problems encountered by women while participating in literacy education programmes are lack of home-centre proximity, house chores, husband factor, unconducive literacy centre, inappropriate furniture, irregular facilitators, disrespect from facilitators, and predominant male facilitators. This finding is related to that of Njoku (2019) who found that the determinants of learners' participation in literacy centres include

a level of awareness, economic potential of the programmes, spousal support and finance. Similarly, Ifeagwazi (2018) also reported that finance, spousal consent, the proximity of learning centres, the flexibility of the programme and programme potential are strong factors influencing women's participation in literacy programmes.

Conclusion

Based on the findings from the study, it has been established that basic, advanced and functional literacy programmes are available for women. This probably explains why the women have a positive view of the literacy programme provided for them. However, the level of awareness about literacy education programmes for women is low. This could explain the lack of participation. This can, however, be enhanced through increased awareness creation, flexibility of programmes, employment of female facilitators, free literacy books and making literacy programmes compulsory for women. Women encounter certain problems while participating in literacy education programmes including lack of home-centre proximity, house chores, husband factor, unconducive literacy centre, inappropriate furniture, irregular facilitators, disrespect from facilitators, and predominant male facilitators.

Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusions from the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Literacy centre managers should include skill acquisition programmes that can also be added to literacy programmes to ensure that the women have means of livelihood in addition to the acquisition of literacy skills.
2. Literacy centre managers should include incentives that can help to retain the interest of the participants and encourage them to take the programme seriously to benefit maximally from it.
3. Literacy centre managers and facilitators should embark on wide-reaching awareness campaigns through different groups like traditional rulers, religious leaders and marketplaces among others.
4. Niger State government should consider enacting laws that will make it compulsory for women to attend literacy programmes without being hindered by their husbands.

5. Niger State government should consider establishing conducive and properly furnished literacy centres in close proximity to homes in addition to employing more female facilitators for literacy centres. Facilitators should also be regularly trained on the ethics and modalities of facilitation in literacy centres.

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