

Impact of Adult Literacy Programmes on Political Empowerment of Women in Kwara State

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of adult literacy programmes on political empowerment of women in Kwara State. It specifically, examined politically related issues in the contents of the programmes and impact of the programmes on the political empowerment of women in the State. The study adopted Expost Facto research design. The sample of 380 women adult literacy beneficiaries were selected through snow-ball sampling technique. Data was collected through Adult Literacy Programmes and Women Political Empowerment Questionnaire (ALPWPEQ) and documentary analysis. The questionnaire was validated by the adult literacy expert and its reliability was determined through test-re-test method and 0.76 co-efficient was obtained. The data was subjected to documentary analysis; mean scores statistics, simple tabulation and chi-square. The findings of the study revealed that the contents of literacy programmes for women are politically related, the literacy programme had impacted politically on the status of women in Kwara State. The literacy programmes have not been able to develop in women political leadership confidence. The study recommends that a more ideological literacy programme such as literacy for CONSCIENTIZATION should be adopted. And rule of law, seeking information about candidates in an election and political accountability should be part of adult literacy contents for women in Kwara State.

Keywords: Impact, Adult Literacy, Political Empowerment

1.1 Introduction

The indispensable role of women in the developmental effort of the society calls for their empowerment at all levels. There is no gain saying the fact that in most developed and developing countries including Nigeria women are being marginalized, vilified, dominated, discriminated against, exploited and excluded from participating in major public policy formulation and development programmes (Ebirim, 2008). The 2006 Nigeria Census figure indicates that female constituted 48.7 % of the entire population. Many of them are illiterate, poor, disadvantaged politically, socially and culturally.

The implication of the above features for women in Nigeria is that they are bound to be backward compared to their male counterparts. For women to break these barriers they need access to power over economic, social, psychological and cultural situations to enable them have knowledge to transform the world to their advantage. Knowledge gained, if put into profitable use, help in liberating people from the shackle of hunger, poverty and other vices that hinders ones proper existence. In an effort to attain liberation for women-folk Roseline, Arikpo and Justina (2006) advocate empowering women as a way of boosting their capacity to make choices and to transform the choices made into desired actions and outcomes.

The issue of women and empowerment came into forefront during the United Nation decade for women (1976-1985). The observed marginalization and discrimination against women all over the world compelled the United Nation to hold conferences, pronounced declarations and embark on programmes to redress the imbalance. The central theme of all the conferences has been the need to raise the status of women and bring them into the development process (Ike, 2006).

Beijing Conference Reports indicate that empowerment of women must be viewed beyond mere participation in decision-making. It should lead to a process whereby women will perceive themselves as able to make decision (United Nation, 1995). Nigeria, as one of the participating nations in the Beijing Conference came up with a National Policy on Women in 1998, which articulated women plights and ways of addressing them. The Policy emphasizes, that woman empowerment can best be achieved and sustained through enlightenment campaign, skill acquisition, functional literacy and numeracy.

In line with this, governments in Nigeria have been showing commitment to provide functional education for women in the country through establishment of various women education and adult literacy centres. In Kwara State for example, Kwara State Agency for Mass Education, Ministry of Women Affairs and Local Government Education Units have championed the course of empowering women for socio-economic development of the state. To empower the women would mean putting to use the information available to them to make effective decisions. This calls for some forms of literacy and education.

Literacy as defined by UNESCO is the ability of a person to function in all the activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his/her group and the community and also for enabling him/her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his/her own and the community's development (EFA Global

Monitoring Report, 2005:30). The relevance of this definition comes into picture in this study because literacy is regarded as a powerful tool for the development and empowerment of women. Literacy is considered a right, an essential and adds value to a person's life. The building of a literate society will lead to the development and empowerment of women to be able to understand their environment and institutions governing them. Education for women means that they will come to know the importance of understanding their rights and duties. Their coming together at literacy classes provides a platform for them to share their experiences as women. Rural women, who were socially excluded, although they form the larger part of the population of Nigeria, will be able to take their rightful positions in societies through their engagement in literacy programmes.

The connection between literacy and political engagement is predicated on the assumption that as individuals become more exposed to information about their environment, especially the public institutions and government, they will be more prepared to intervene to make such bodies more responsive to their needs. There is, the expectations also that as individuals are engaged in political decisions about the myriad aspects of lives, an intimate connection emerges between literacy and democracy. Few people could deny that entering formal relations with state and other modern institutions today requires print communications. Therefore, attention to literacy – defined as individual access to reading and writing – is an inescapable proposition.

There are some adult literacy programmes that focus on the development of citizenship and autonomous attitudes in adult learners. These programmes are usually based on the consciousness – raising and dialogical approaches pioneered by Paulo Freire. Literacy of this kind helps to build in individual the spirit of being questioning the existing obstacles to one's life.

Evidence from literacy classes showed that learners acquire information such as voting in an election, seeking information about candidates or issues, participating in discussion of political party or social movement. Other information learners are exposed to are; quality of government service, level of corruption, accountability, political freedom, rule based governance, and extent of judicial unpredictability (Stromquist; 2005).

The above information can go along way to educate and empower an individual towards his stand and position in democracy and good governance.

Research findings have indicated positive relationship between literacy programme and change in attitude towards community participation. The study of four Adult Basic Education (ABE) programmes by Greenleigh Associates (1968), one of the earliest nationwide evaluations of its kind, found that literacy participants reported an increase in community participation. A later study by Becker et al (1976) was based on follow-up of participants after one to one years after completing their programmes. It found that 84 percent of the former learners reported no change in their voter registration status; also 84 of the participants reported no change in community participation (Stromquist; 2005).

Two of the few qualitative studies of the literacy impacts in developing countries were conducted by Carron et al (1989) in Kenya and Kagitcibasi et al (2005) in Turkey. The Kenyan study used a sample of 371 literacy graduates and 66 illiterates as a comparison group in five different rural locations in the country. Literacy graduates did better in a wide variety of behavioral and attitudinal indicators that included participation in elections and local associations. The Turkish study used an urban sample of 95 women in an assessment carried out immediately after programme participation and a subset of 50 women in a follow-up after one year of programme participation. It used various instruments, including a social participation scale and a self-efficacy scale. Kagitcibasi et al found that literacy programme participants in the social participants in the social participation scale and that over time gains in self efficiency increased considerably while gains in social participation increased only slightly.

Burchfield et al study of Nepali women (2002) shows that by the end of the second year of programme participation, more women in the literacy programme (across all levels of engagement in the literacy programme) than those not in literacy programme demonstrated political knowledge and thought they could serve as political representatives. More women literates also participated in community groups and were aware of women and girls experiences with trafficking and domestic violence.

In Nigeria also Egbo (2002) compared non-literate women to literate women. The study, focusing on 36 rural women through individual and focus group interviews, found that non-literate women felt their literacy had negative impacts on their self-esteem and that it prevented them from full participation in community meetings because other assumed they were not very knowledgeable. In contrast literate women reported being confident enough to participate in community meeting, considered they knew their rights better than the non-literate women, and felt more confident to make autonomous decisions.

The above scenario depicts powerful nature of literacy in political empowerment. This shows that our women need to be educated to remove them from shackle of political marginalization and ignorance as well as culture of silence. The realization that adult literacy has potential to bring about development for men and women has motivated governments, non governmental organizations and individuals to subscribe for adult literacy, for empowerment purpose.

Nigerian government for example started her efforts in the promotion of adult literacy since the colonial time. The first mass literacy campaign in Nigeria took place in 1940s. Another National Mass Literacy Campaign was

launched in 1982 in Nigeria. The programme was slated to last for ten years (1982-1992) with the aim of eradicating illiteracy for socio-economic and political development of Nigerian adults.

In line with the government desire to achieve the goal of a literate, economic, political and social developed society, a number of administrative structures have been set up. There was an establishment of a National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education in 1990. Various states of federation also established their own agencies for mass education for the states.

In Kwara State, Agency for Mass Education was established to provide adult and non-formal education programmes. The establishment of the agency gave impetus to the literacy efforts in Kwara State. This was seen in the establishment of literacy classes in different parts of the state. The importance of literacy was also stressed to promote socio-economic, political and educational development of women in the state (Kwara State Agency for Mass Education, 1999).

One of the prominent programmes of the Kwara State Agency for Mass Education is Adult literacy programme. The objective of this programme is to alleviate illiteracy through basic and post literacy programmes which are delivered through traditional and functional approach, so as to expose individuals to information about their environment, especially, socio-political life, public institutions and government, thereby adequately prepare them to intervene to make such bodies more responsive to their needs. And as such effort will uplift the standard of living of people in the state.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Considering the introduction of adult literacy programmes in the Kwara State Agency for Mass Education, it would be interesting to understand whether political emancipation of adults which forms one of the important objectives of literacy programme has been met. It is on the basis of this that this study examined the impact of adult literacy programmes of the Kwara State Agency for Mass Education on political empowerment of women in Kwara State

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general aim of the study is to examine the impact of adult literacy programmes of the Kwara State Agency for Mass Education on political empowerment of women in Kwara state. The aim was achieved through the following specific objectives:

- (i) To determine the politically related issues in adult literacy programmes for women in Kwara State; and
- (ii) To assess the impact of adult literacy programmes on political status of women in Kwara State;

1.4 Research Questions

For the purpose of this study the following research questions were examined:

- (i) What are the politically related issues contained in adult literacy programme for women in Kwara State?
- (ii) What is the impact of Adult Literacy Programmes on political status of women in Kwara State?

2.1 Methodology

The research adopted Ex-post Facto design to examine the impact of adult literacy programmes on political empowerment of women in Kwara State. The design was adopted in view of the fact that, the research explored not only what adult literacy programmes constituted to the women participants but also considered the consequences on their political empowerment in Kwara State. The population for this study comprised of all the 40,400 women beneficiaries in the Kwara State Agency for Mass Education Adult Literacy Programmes (Kwara State Agency for Mass Education, 2009). The sample size of this study comprised of 380 Adult literacy women beneficiaries in the Kwara State Agency for Mass Education Adult literacy programmes. This study employed snowballing (network sampling) procedure in selecting the sample women adult literacy beneficiaries across Kwara State. In this procedure, each participant to be included in the study is nominated by a preceding woman adult literacy beneficiary as appropriate for the study. To choose the women adult literacy programme, the researcher contacted the Kwara State Agency for Mass Education, Ilorin's staff who linked the researcher to the known literacy beneficiaries. The researcher in turn asked the known subjects to refer other beneficiaries. These beneficiaries were then followed up and the procedure was repeated until the sample size was completed. The research instrument used for the study was Adult Literacy Programme and Women Political Empowerment Questionnaire (ALPWPEQ) and ALPWPEQ was designed for women adult literacy beneficiaries. The questionnaire consists of two sections. Section A contains questions of which all are one four-point scale of strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree and disagree. Questions in this section seek detail on the impact of the programmes on women political status. Section B seeks information on the political related contents of adult literacy programmes for women in Kwara State. The responses had two levels of rating i.e yes or no. The researchers explored both content and face validity by giving the draft questionnaires to the experts in the Department of Adult Education and Community Services, Bayero University, Kano for vetting, its reliability was determined using test-re-test method and a coefficient of 0.76 was obtained.

The questionnaire for the women adult literacy beneficiaries was administered on the respondents by the researcher with the help of three research assistants. The respondents (Women Adult Literacy Beneficiaries) were contacted at their various locations in Kwara State which took the researcher and the research assistants

five weeks before getting the questionnaire administered to the respondents. All the administered questionnaires were returned and used for the analysis. Data was analyzed using, tabulation percentages, mean scores and chi-square test.

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Research Question One

What are the politically related issues contained in adult literacy programme for women in Kwara State? This research question was answered using mean score statistic and result is presented in table 1 (note 1)

3.1.2 Research Question Two

What are the impacts of Adult Literacy Programmes on politically status of women in Kwara State? This research question was answered using simple tabulation percentage and chi-square and result was presented in table 2 (note 2)

4.1 Discussion of Findings:

The inclusion of information about voters' registration, voting in an election, participation in political party's activities, seeking information about quality of government services and election malpractices in adult literacy programmes for women in Kwara State is an indication that adult literacy programmes for women in the State have potential for political emancipation of women. This is a right signal that literacy programmes can withstand the test of time for political empowerment of the participants. This result is consistent with the study of Stromquist (2005) which reported that the evidence from literacy classes showed that learners acquire politically related information which fortifies them to stand politically in their communities.

Participation of women in political and community development activities as a result of their participation in adult literacy programmes is a welcome development in Kwara State. In fact their understanding that money politic is not healthy for democracy and good governance is an indication that women can be liberated and empowered politically in Kwara State where a family dominates politics. This empowerment of women will go along way to enable women speak against any injustice done to them. In fact, it will increase their self-confidence, self-respect and political awareness. In this regard Hopfer (1999) stressed that women who attended literacy programmes were able to gain control over the social political and economic forces influencing their lives by the realization of their existing knowledge and offering additional knowledge there by conscientizing participants to question assumptions and encouraging them to be active in order to solve the resultant contradictions.

The item-by-item analysis showed that adult literacy programmes in Kwara State have not developed in women political leadership confidence as many of them still believe that they cannot compete favourably with their male counterparts in vying for political positions. Lack of political leadership confidence in women literacy programmes beneficiaries in Kwara State might due to what Yusuf (2011) reported in his titled "Impact of adult literacy programmes on women empowerment in Kwara State" which indicated that lack of adoption of consciousness-raising and dialogical literacy approaches has negatively affected the extent of political impact of adult literacy programmes on women In the State.

5.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1.1 Conclusion

This study examined the impact of the Adult literacy programmes of the Kwara State Agency for Mass Education on the political empowerment of women in Kwara State. From the findings it is apparent that the adult literacy programmes of the Kwara State Agency for Mass Education have potential for political empowerment of the participants (women) as indicated in the contents of the programmes, though, if conscientization literacy is incorporated into literacy programmes for women the political empowerment capability of the literacy programmes would have been more ascertained. The programmes have equally impacted positively on the political status of the women beneficiaries in Kwara State. Although, the study indicated that much is still needed to be done especially in the area of making literacy to develop political leadership confidence in the participants (women).

5.1.2 Recommendations

1. Rule of law, political accountability, and seeking information about candidates should be part of the contents of the literacy programmes in the literacy classes for women in the State
2. The literacy organizers should adopt consciousness-raising and dialogical literacy approaches in the State literacy programme as such effort would conscientize women for political leadership

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Notes

Note 1

Table 1: Politically related issues contained in the contents of Adult literacy programme for women in Kwara State as perceived by the women literacy beneficiaries.

S/N	Political contents of literacy programmes	Weighted Mean Score	Mean Score	Remark
1	Information on voting in an election	1520	4.0	Accepted
2	Information on voters registration	1460	3.8	Accepted
3	Seeking information about candidates	1280	3.4	Rejected
4	Participating in political party meetings and rallies	1350	3.5	Accepted
5	Information about quality of government services	1395	3.7	Accepted
6	Election malpractices	1381	3.6	Accepted
7	Political accountability	882	2.3	Rejected
8	Rule of law	880	2.3	Rejected

Table 1 showed the political related issues in the Kwara State Agency for Mass Education literacy programmes for women in the State as perceived by the beneficiaries. The literacy contents exposed the beneficiaries to information on voting in an election, information on voters' registration, participating in political meetings and rallies, information about quality of government services and election malpractices as confirmed by the mean scores which ranges between 3.5 and 4.0 which are acceptable to the study. The beneficiaries rejected that the literacy programme has as part of its contents; seeking information about candidates, political accountability and rule of law as their mean scores were below the set mean of 3.5.

Note 2

Table 2: Simple Percentages and chi-square of Adult Literacy Beneficiaries on the impact of Adult Literacy programmes on their Political Status

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Responses				Total
		SA/A	%	SD/D	%	
1	Adult literacy programme has enabled me to accept that women are partners in development of their communities	320	84.2	60	15.8	380
2.	Adult literacy programme has enabled me to accept that women can handle leadership position as their male counterparts	196	51.6	184	48.4	380
3.	Adult literacy programme has made me accept that I am eligible to contest in Local election	148	38.9	232	61.1	380
4.	Adult literacy programme has made me to understand that money politics is not healthy for democracy and good governance	352	92.6	28	7.4	380
5.	My ability to follow political events of my community is possible through my participation in adult literacy programmes	341	89.7	39	10.3	380
6.	My active participation in community development activities is gingered by my involvement in adult literacy programmes	353	92.9	27	7.1	380
	Grand Total	1710		570		

X^2 cal = 95.0, df= 1, p-value = 0.0000, level of significance .05

The results showed that the adult literacy beneficiaries perceived that adult literacy programmes have enabled women to accept that women are partner in development of their community; to understand that money politic is not healthy for democracy and good governance. The respondents equally agreed that their participation in community development organizations and following political events of their communities are gingered by their involvement in adult literacy programmes. However, item by item analysis indicated that the literacy programmes have not been able to develop in the beneficiaries political leadership confidence as many of them indicated in their responses. The above responses constitute the specific impact of adult literacy programmes on political status of women in Kwara State as showed in the items of the questionnaire on table 3.

The Chi- square test results indicated that there is a significant difference in the perceived opinions of the women adult literacy programmes beneficiaries with regards to the impact of Adult literacy programmes on their political status ($X^2=95.04$ df = 1, p = 0.0000, α = 0.05). A further look at the results on average showed that 75% (285) of the respondents agreed that adult literacy programmes have impacted on their political status in Kwara State while 25% (95) are of the opinion that the programmes have not impacted on their political status in the state.