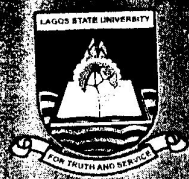


EDUCATION

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FUNCTIONAL LITERACY EDUCATION AS A DETERMINANT OF RURAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN LAGOS STATE.

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Abstract

One of the major problems confronting rural women empowerment in Lagos state is illiteracy. Women in the rural setting in Lagos State are mainly into petty trading, farming and weaving while majority of them are unable to acquire formal education. Literacy is commonly considered as the ability to read and write at a designed level of proficiency. The study therefore examines the extent to which rural women could be empowered through functional literacy education programmes in Lagos State. The design of the study was descriptive survey research design. The sample was made up of 200 productive women randomly selected from 20 rural communities in Western Senatorial Zone of Lagos State. The research instrument was a self-designed questionnaire with four point rating scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The instrument has reliability co-efficient of 0.85. Descriptive statistics of frequency and percentages were used to analyze the demographic data while chi-square(χ^2) was used to determine the significance of the study at 0.05 alpha levels. The result indicates that functional education is very imperative in enhancing rural women empowerment in Lagos State. This assertion was supported by Chi-square(χ^2) result of 381.79 which was greater than the χ^2 critical value of 21.03. Another result of Chi-square (χ^2) also indicates the Chi-Square of 997.2 which was also greater than Chi-Square (χ^2) critical value of 21.03. This further confirms that functional literacy education is a powerful factor of rural women development in Lagos State. The study therefore recommends that Lagos State government should pay a more significant attention to functional literacy education programme as a bold step toward tackling literacy among rural women in Lagos State.

Introduction

The issue of rural women empowerment has been a matter of concern in Nigeria, particularly in Lagos State considering its population and potentials which have not been sufficiently utilized. The traditional attitude to every sphere of a woman's life points to her as inferior. The prevailing attitude that all women must marry suggests that women are inferior and that they are incapable of caring for themselves. In addition, her inferiority is further supported by the belief that her rightful place is said to be in the kitchen and does not need formal education to perform such roles.

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Igwe (1994) asserts that often time, it is believed by our rural communities that women education is a waste of time because after having it, they will take all at their home, or might even get pregnant in the process. Combined with these are the difficulties in making rural women available to embrace functional literacy education. According to Olaniyonu (1997), the problem of illiteracy among women is particularly widespread in developing countries because they often have less access to formal education in comparison with men. Women in the rural setting in developing countries, particularly in Nigeria, are mainly into trading, farming, weaving, with majority being unable to acquire formal education up to first school leaving certificate. Illiteracy among these women can only be meaningfully eliminated when majority of them become enlightened, replace their empty minds with willing ones and are ready to accommodate other people's law and ideas and one's way of doing this through adult literacy education (Olaniyonu, 1997).

Conceptually, literacy is commonly considered as the ability to read and write at a designated level of proficiency. Literacy, according to UNICEF (2001) is defined as the ability to "both read write with understanding, short simple statement on his /her everyday life." Literacy enables an individual to apply the skills of reading and writing to daily life and to continue using the written word. Literacy education means the acquisition of the skills of reading, writing and numeracy by an adult. However an adult is defined by Brinmon (1998) as a person who has attained some level of maturity recognized by the society to which he/she belongs. Thus, adult education simply means any education given to an adult either by a man or a woman, by an instructor.

Functional Literacy, according to Anyanwu (1987) and Nelson (2004), refers to an educational activity which combines socio-economic and vocational training within the frame work of a developmental undertaking. Functional Literacy is part of adult education and it gives prominence to any organized activity to foster education in the adult, the development of attitudes, knowledge and skills which will equip him/her to perform his/her role in the society in a creative fashion.

Women education is highly important in any society and its importance cannot be overemphasized. It is only through education that they can be properly and sufficiently empowered to make meaningful contributions to the family, community and society.

The purpose of this study therefore, is to examine the extent to which rural women could be empowered through functional literacy education in the state.

Research hypothesis

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

- Functional Literacy education will not significantly enhance rural women empowerment in Lagos State.
- Functional Literacy education will not significantly be a factor of rural women development in Lagos State.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was utilized for the study. The sample was made up of 200 productive women (subjects) randomly selected from 20 rural communities in Western Senatorial district of Lagos State. The research instrument was self- designed Likert-type questionnaire with four point rating scales of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The instrument has a reliability index of $r = 0.85$. It was administered by the researchers themselves. However, two research assistant helped in the interpretation of the instrument to the respondents in Yoruba and Egun languages respectively. Descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the demographic data while Chi-Square(χ^2) was used to determine the significance of the study at 0.005 alpha level.

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Analysis of Result

Table 1: Demographic information

Frequency and percentage Analyses of Age Respondents

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
25-30	81	40.5%
31-36	76	38%
37-42	11	5.5%
38 and above	32	16%
Total	200	100%

The table 1 above shows the frequency and percentage distribution of questionnaire by age. A total of 81 (40%) of the respondents were between the age range of 25-30 years, 76(38%) of them fell between the age range of 31-36 years, 11 of them fell between the age range of 37-42 while 32(16%) of them between the age range of 38years and above.

Table 2: frequency and percentage Analyses of Respondents' Occupation

OCCUPATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Farming/weaving	82	41%
Trading	98	49%
Full house wife	13	6.5%
Nanny	7	3.5%
Total	200	100%

Table 2 above displays the frequency and percentage distribution of questionnaire by occupation. A total of 82 (41%) of respondents were engaged in both farming and weaving while 98 (49%) were traders. Thirteen respondents representing (6.5%) of the respondents were full time house wives, while only 7 representing (3.5%) of the respondents were nannies. It could further be observed from the analysis that trading, farming and mat weaving are the major occupations among the rural women in Lagos State.

Hypothesis 1: Functional Literacy Education will not significantly enhance women empowerment in Lagos State.

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Table

S/N	Questions	SA	A	SD	D	Total
1	Rural women empowerment can be objectively achieved through meaningful functional literacy programmes	76 (38%)	89 (45%)	22 (11%)	13 (7%)	200
2	Rural women need empowerment more than anything else because it will make them to participate actively in the family, community and society development	128 (69%)	50 (25%)	15 (8%)	7 (4%)	200
3	The only basic required skill for rural women is functional literacy programme.	54 (27%)	63 (32%)	69 (35%)	14 (7%)	200
4	Functional Literacy education should be a prioritized sensitive project responsible by local Government council to enhance rural women empowerment.	130 (65%)	60 (38%)	3 (2%)	7 (4%)	200
5	Literacy education programme might not make any impact for rural women empowerment	23 (12%)	34 (17%)	73 (27%)	70 (35%)	200
	Total	411	296	182	111	1000
	% Means	41%	30%	18%	11%	

$\chi^2_{cal} = 381.79 > \chi^2_{tab} = 21.03, df = 12, p = 0.5$ Decision H_0 rejected

From the table above, averagely, 41% and 30% of respondents respectively agreed to the questions asked while 18% and 11% disagreed. The Chi-Square analysis showed that the calculated χ^2 value of 381.79 was greater than the critical value of 21.03 at 0.05 level of significance and with 12 degrees of freedom. Thus, the hypothesis which states that "Functional literacy education will not significantly enhance women empowerment in Lagos State" was rejected. This further indicates that functional literacy can go a long way in enhancing rural women in empowerment in Lagos State.

Hypothesis 2: Functional literacy will not significantly be a factor of rural women development in Lagos State

S/N	Questions	SA	A	SD	D	Total
1	Functional literacy has nothing to do With rural women liberation and empowerment	8 (4%)	16 (8%)	152 (76%)	24 (12%)	200
2	Rural women are civilized enough and do not require literacy education for development	11 (5.5%)	10 (5%)	43 (21.5%)	136 (68%)	200
3	Literacy education can help develop rural women to participate and contribute to the progress and development of the society	75 (37.8%)	106 (53%)	8 (4%)	11 (5.5%)	200
4	Women development means empowering women to contribute to the development of their family, community and society and can only be achieved through good education	153 (76.5%)	29 (14.5%)	6 (3%)	12 (6%)	200
5	Women education will help to develop and deliver them from age-long acceptance of female subordination and passiveness	53 (26.5%)	108 (54%)	14 (7.0%)	25 (12.5%)	200
	Total	300	269	225	208	1000
	Averages	38%	27%	2.23%	21%	

Cal $\chi^2 = 997.2 > \text{tab } \chi^2 = 21.03, df = 12, p = .05$. Decision: H_0 rejected

From the table above, it could be discovered that averagely, 38% and 27% of the respondents respectively confirmed their agreement to the questions asked while only 2.23% and 21% indicated their disagreement.

The Chi-Square value of 997.2 was also greater than the critical value of 21.03 at 0.05 level of significance and with 12 degrees of freedom; therefore, the hypothesis was rejected by implication, functional literacy education serves as a significant factor of rural women civilization and development in Lagos State.

Discussion of Findings

It is observed from the findings that functional education literacy is imperative for enhancing rural women empowerment in Lagos State. This supports Omolewa's (1985) statement that functional literacy is a traditional literacy (reading and writing and a programme of education geared towards political and socio-economic development programme of the society. Literacy according to UNICEF (2001) represents the potential for the individual's further intellectual growth and also contributes to the wider socio-economic and cultural development of society. The importance of women's education cannot be overemphasized. According to Ajayi (2004), if you educate a man, you educate an individual but if you educate a woman, you educate a family and a whole nation.

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Women have the greatest inclination to stay at home and spend very long periods of time with their children (Ukoha 2005). If educated, they would be able to influence more people and hence contribute more to the society. There is, therefore, the need to educate women properly, as this will enhance their ability to transmit the social values to their children, as they raise them (feeding, washing and showing them the way of life). Empowerment is the creation of opportunities for individuals to participate actively in the development of the family, community and society. According to Ajayi (2004), it entails a complexity of change in developmental issues such as combating poverty, raising productivity, widening access to education, improving health conditions, enhancing agriculture and the environment, providing legal and political recognition, maintaining cultural values and enjoying peaceful co-existence. Empowerment of women can best be achieved and made sustainable through enlightenment and training, skill acquisition, functional literacy and numeracy through education.

The finding also reveals that functional literacy education serves as a determining factor for rural women civilization and development in Lagos State. This is significant inline with Olateju (2006), who asserts that functional literacy education is an educational action which combines socio-economic and vocational training within the framework of society development. It is an activity which enhances the intellectual and civic training of rural women and makes it possible for them to adapt to their environment irrespective of any civilization. Rural women literacy education programmes can help women to acquire basic functional literacy and numeracy which consequently can improve their occupation or trade as market women. Development, according to Hurlock (1982), is both qualitative and quantitative and involves a progressive series of orderly and coherent changes that takes place in an individual. Santrop (2000) and Ukoha (2005) see development as a pattern of movement or change that begins at conception and continues throughout life span. Growth and development express themselves not only through changes in appearance but also in behavior. According to Chizea (1983), development is to make active or to improve the growth of something. She defines women development as the art of making women more active in issues concerning self, family, community and the nation. Developing women helps in promoting self-actualization and independence. This implies that they must have the fundamental human rights sensibilities that the opposite gender has. These way women too can claim their fundamental human rights and assert their own identity in the society. It therefore means that they must know who they are by having a stable identity.

All these can be achieved if women receive functional literacy education. According to Oguagu (1990), women education is a sine qua non for social, economic and political advancement of any nation. The indications shows that in most societies, especially in the developing countries like Nigeria, women's education is given secondary consideration vis-à-vis the education of men. Through functional literacy education, the minds of the rural women will be broadened and they can become contributors to the socio-economic development.

Conclusion and Recommendation

On the basis of the results, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The importance of functional literacy education for rural women cannot be overemphasized. If sincerely and objectively pursued by the government, functional literacy education will enhance rural women empowerment in the state.
- Functional literacy education serves as a significant factor of rural women civilization in Lagos State.
- Education is an important factor in equipping and developing the skills of women to carry out their socio-economic functions in the family, community, society and the nation.

As one of the primary facilitators' of human development education, must be available to women, including rural women in Lagos State.

A number of things are already being done in the area of women development like the establishment of the Ministry of women Affairs and the decisions taken at the Fourth World Conference on women held in Beijing in 1995 and the African Conference on the empowerment of women through Functional Literacy and Education of the Girl-child in Kampala in 1996. More still needs to be done.

The implementation of decisions from these conferences should be extended to rural women in Lagos State. Based on the points above, the following recommendations were made:

- The Lagos State government should formulate an educational policy on the implementation of decisive decisions emanating from the Beijing and Kampala conferences as regards the empowerment of women through functional literacy education;
- The State Ministry of Education should create functional literacy education centre in each local government area to guarantee access to and improvement of the quality of women education;
- Well qualified and educated women at each centre in the rural area should be empowered sufficiently to teach their fellow women who are educationally backward and need literacy improvement;
- Each local government council should be mandated as a matter of policy by the state government to make funds and other functional materials available at various functional literacy educational centres;
- The state government through the Ministry of Education and in conjunction with the local government should appoint women to supervise the functioning ability of each functional literacy education centre, and also to supervise the functional literacy education delivery system.

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