

AN ASSESSMENT OF LITERACY NEEDS OF NON-LITERATE WOMEN IN IBADAN, OYO STATE

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Abstract

This study examines literacy needs among women. This is a topic which has gained considerable attention for some years. In this study the, attention is given to the literacy needs of women as a draw-card for participation in literacy programmes. Women have literacy needs which are different from men. The study therefore, examines the various reasons why women patronize literacy centres. Four research questions were raised in the study. The study adopted expo facto survey design. The study was limited to literacy centres within Ibadan land. Two hundred (200) respondents randomly selected from Model Adult Literacy Centres in Ibadan, both governmental and Non-governmental centres using a standardized scale: Literacy needs of women scale for data collection. The data obtained were analyzed using the simple statistical tools of frequency counts and percentages. Findings from the study show that the most paramount reasons why women need literacy is for self-independence and reliance. It was also noted that the least reason why women attend literacy centres is social recognition. While the impact literacy has on women helps them to be of assistance to their children/wards academically. One major factor, that serves as threat to female adults learner is time as they see the literacy programme consuming time more than expected and likewise, the support of spouses' was also noted as aid to participation. Based on the findings. It was recommended that literacy programmes should focus more on functional literacy, contents taught should allow women to help their children with homework. Also, income-generating activities that allow women make money and help with their household finances should be part of literacy provision. More literacy centres are needed and available ones should be equipped. Programmes must consider flexibility in terms of when learners can come in to learn at times suitable to their lifestyle.

Key words: Assessment, Literacy Need, Women, Illiteracy, and Poverty

Introduction

Acquiring the skills of literacy could be one major step in enabling women take control of their lives, achieve self-reliance, develop positive self-esteem and participate on a more equal basis in societies. Hitherto, women over the years were neglected in the provision of educational opportunities and development, this limited their participation and involvement at large (Olomukoro, 2012). This was occasioned by religious beliefs, inferior traditional and cultural roles. With interventions from feminist movements, global movements such as Education for All(EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDG), there is a reversal of this trend and women are becoming more visible in national development. This reversal has been made possible immensely through functional literacy acquisition tailored to meet their peculiar needs. Interventions tailored to suit the literacy needs of women. In Nigeria, the interventions are few and erratic. Women have needs that are different to the general needs of literacy clientele.

The needs of women vary from one context to the other. For example, in Mali, women patronize literacy programme in order to help their children with school subjects (Puchner, 1993). This is also corroborated by findings in Modumogu (2012) among female adult learners in Benue State; women believe that with their acquisition of literacy skills they will be able to impact on the education of their children, as well as on

the health, economic well-being of their families to achieve self-reliance and self-esteem. Furthermore, these women, especially the younger ones, felt they have been robbed of their self-esteem. The daily embarrassment and humiliation these women face as they have to depend on other people to sign documents, read letters, or read procedural texts on medicine bottles pushed them to seek help in adult literacy programmes. Many adult literacy programmes abound in Ibadan; the questions is, are these programmes really meeting the needs of the clients, are they relevant to their lives and needs?

Lingam, (2009) asserted that beyond reasonable doubt, literacy has been found to be a weapon of change and development. It serves as the basis for survival in any environment. "Literacy has the potential to empower, enrich and enlighten people who are powerless, and in doing so, it acknowledges and enhances the dignity of mankind". Literacy itself is the heart of all major changes that take place in our world (Wagner, 2000). Although the incidence of poverty is much higher in the rural areas than in the urban centers, the urban slum-dwellers form one of the more deprived groups in Nigeria. Amaghionyeodiwe & Osinubi (2004) found that poverty is a product of illiteracy. The poor are basically the uneducated who are unable to find a stable job, obtain adequate income, own property or maintain healthy living conditions and satisfy their basic needs. As such the poor are often illiterate with poor health and have a short life span. As a result of this, this research work is set to look into

reasons why women need literacy? With this, the desire of any woman to be literate falls within one of these reasons mentioned above. Having the advantage to read, understand, and act on written material as well as basic numerical information is fundamental in our daily lives as parents, students, workers, community members, and citizens. Oxenham (2008) argues that “investment in adult education with literacy is as productive as investing in primary, secondary or university education”.

For literacy to have an impact on the recipient and women in this particular case, it must be functional as well as permanent. Thus in this study, the view is adopted that:

A person is literate when he has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community, and whose attainments in reading, writing and arithmetic make it possible for him to continue to use these skills towards his own and community development (UNESCO 1962, pp. 82).

Thus, conceptually literacy is to assist women in performing their distinctive role in the society skillfully and efficiently. Like men, women are also heavily involved in economic production and community organization. Besides,

they take prime responsibility as home managers, career of children and elderly. Their social roles in the society cannot be over emphasized. Oftentimes, women help resolve conflict, harvest and process food. The concept and application of literacy for the performance of the above tasks successfully and efficiently are crucial in the modern times. As a matter of fact, the most urgent priority is to ensure access to and improve the quality of education for girls and women

In the context of this study, women literacy includes basic education, designed to meet basic learning needs. This comprises instruction at the first level, on which subsequent learning can be based; early childhood and primary education for children, as well as education in literacy, general knowledge and life skills for girls and women. We can also talk of family planning literacy, designed to slow down population growth, raise the age of marriage, decrease the desired family size, encourage family planning efforts and thereby reduce poverty. Functional literacy to improve old skills and develop new skills are vital to women survival; especially in the rural areas: No doubt, literacy skill, by itself, can increase considerably the productivity of uneducated and low-technology women farmers. The programme can take the form of work-oriented literacy, cooperative literacy and even computer literacy. Literacy for women must be functional and not necessarily work-oriented. The learning of literacy and numeracy should be combined with the learning of some other desired knowledge.

At the same time, part of the functional element of any literacy course must be to assist women to take greater control. Literacy with a socio-economic content must include training of women in management of their projects and in how to mobilize their own resources. We can also refer to health-oriented literacy, designed to improve upon the health of families. Literacy can also take the form of social education, designed to improve upon the culture of participants. Conceptually women literacy should be seen as education programmes arranged for females as wide as their needs in the society as a whole and specifically in the rural areas.

Basic education is necessary, but not sufficient as far as women literacy is concerned. Any literacy programme designed for women women's literacy programme ought to be development-oriented; that is, must be designed as part of a process of continuing education. This is expected to lead female learners from one subject to another (e.g. agriculture to nutrition) or from one language to another. The style and process of literacy teaching must take into account the status of the learners' status and interests. It is arguable that this is the best way to increase women's motivation and to enable them to make the best use of the limited time which they can afford.

This study lays emphasis on the importance and positive impact of literacy on the lives of women and how it affects their children and communities as shown in the works of Oxenham (2005, 2008). Burchfield, Hua, Barala & Rocha (2002,

2002a); Nordtveit (2004) and Carr-Hill (2001), among others as cited in a book called "*Power of Literacy*" (2012). This research work therefore, aims at assessing why literacy is important to women and its impact on their daily performance within their families, societies and communities they belong in relation to their economic and social life in Ibadan, Oyo State.

Statement of the Problem

Women's powerlessness arises from their illiteracy, lack of awareness, information and knowledge about markets and lack of skills, their overall lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, lack of money, job opportunities, and insight into their circumstances aggravate their powerlessness. The provision of literacy programmes in most parts of Nigeria is based on the equivalence of primary school education. Oftentimes the content taught to adult learners often is the same that are taught to primary pupils; same texts books are used. Where there is a little departure is when primers produced by the government or other partner organisations are used. The content of these primers are based not on school-like subjects as it is in the primary school curriculum but on identified areas of need to provide general information on health, agriculture, family planning and other topics relevant to adult life. As noble as this is, it is grossly deficient in what most women need to cope and participate and contribute effectively too family life and society. This general knowledge is used in the learning experience for both men and women. From studies identified, it has been revealed that women have literacy

needs that are different than men. These needs are specific to them and important to their ability to perform their roles in the society. This study therefore, assesses women and their literacy needs and the impact this has on their socio-economic lives.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study include the following:

- 1) to investigate reasons why women need literacy
- 2) to make impact assessment of literacy on women
- 3) to find out factors militating against women acquiring literacy
- 4) to investigate the role of spouses on women literacy acquiring

Research Questions

- 1) Why do women need literacy?
- 2) What impact does literacy have on women?
- 3) What are the factors militating against women acquiring literacy?
- 4) What roles do spouses play in women literacy acquisition?

Methodology

The population of the study consisted of all women in Ibadan attending adult literacy programmes owned by government and non-governmental organizations. Their total population as at the time this study was carried out was one thousand three hundred and fifty three (1,353) adult learners.

A total of 200 women was randomly selected using simple random sampling procedure to collect data for the

study. Through purposive sampling, a total of eight centres were selected based on centre viability criterion. Twenty-five respondents were randomly selected from each of the centres. The participating centres are: Model Adult Literacy centre, Immanuel College High School, Model Literacy centre, Bishop Phillips Academy, Monatan Iwo Road, and Model Literacy centre, Baptist Secondary School, Liberty Road Oke Ado, Ibadan, Adult Literacy centre, C.A.C Oke- Agbara, Agbowo, Ajegunle Baptist centre, Agbowo, Ibadan, Prison Literacy centre, Agodi Secretariat, Akinyele Local government centre, AponmodeMoniya, Ibadan and Ido Local Government centre organized by Agency for Adult and Non-formal Education (AANFE) within the city.

The instrument employed for data collection for the study were copies of questionnaire (Literacy Needs of Women Questionnaire). The questionnaire had 5 sections. Section 'A' contains questions on demographic characteristics of the respondents, while sections 'B' to 'E' contained items specifically meant to measure the indices in the study that are related to literacy needs of women.

A total of 200 copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents on the number of learners in each of centres sampled. The data obtained from this study were analyzed using statistical tools of frequency counts and percentages.

Results

Research Question 1: Why do women need literacy?

Table 1: Table showing responses to the reasons why women need literacy

	Low	Moderate	High	Total %	Mean Rank	Ranking
For me to be socially recognized	11 (5.5)	35 (17.5)	154 (77)	200 (100)	5.76	2
To assist me to participate in a lot of things gainful within the communities	8 (4)	31 (15.5)	161 (80.5)	200 (100)	5.80	3
For enlightenments and help as regard to my political right as a citizen	9 (4.5)	28 (14)	163 (81.5)	200 (100)	5.87	6
To assist my children in their academic work	5 (2.5)	21 (10.5)	174 (87)	200 (100)	6.08	9
To enhance better healthy living for me and my family.	9 (4.5)	25 (12.5)	166 (83)	200 (100)	5.92	7
For self-independence and self-reliance.	7 (3.5)	23 (11.5)	170 (85)	200 (100)	6.11	10
To be able to speak and write English Language	7 (3.5)	26 (13)	167 (83.5)	200 (100)	6.07	8
To know how to operate technological equipments e.g. phone, television etc.	11 (5.5)	37 (18.5)	152 (76)	200 (100)	5.73	1
So as to know how to read my religious books, e.g. Bible or Quran	13 (6.5)	26 (13.0)	161 (80.5)	200 (100)	5.85	5
To learn school-like mathematics for calculation in my business	11 (5.5)	20 (10)	169 (84.5)	200 (100)	5.83	4

The table 1 above indicates that self-independence and self-reliance reflect the highest need of women in literacy participation. As revealed in the mean ranking (6.11, and ranking order 10). Followed by this is the need to be involved in their children's academic work. (6.08, ranking order 9) which is quite close to self-independence and reliance. The next is the need to be literate in English (6.07, ranking order 8), better family living carries a mean ranking of (5.92, ranking order 7), while involvement and engagement of political right follows ranking 6, with a mean ranking of 5.87. This is followed by religious reasons carrying a mean rank of 5.85 and ranks 5.

Use of numeracy for business carries 4 points with a mean rank of 5.83. Community participation carries a mean rank of 5.8 while ranking 3, social recognition is 5.72 and ranks 2, while operating technology gadgets such as mobile phones ranks the least with a mean rank of 5.73 and ranks 1. The findings above reflect various views in literature which is reported in most studies and has been grouped into three broad headings as summarized in Olomukoro 2012.

- 1) Employment, to help them fit to gain employment or gain better employment. It is believed that skills acquired could facilitate better employment status.
- 2) Hope related to children, that is, women want to be involved their children's education. Most women want to know school-like mathematics in order to help with homework, (Puchner 1993).

Research Question 2: What impact does literacy have on women?

Table 2: Table showing responses to impact of literacy impact on women.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total %	Mean Rank	Ranking
With knowledge of literacy, I gained better employment	126 (63)	56 (28)	10 (5)	8 (4)	200 (100)	2.83	1
I can vote for the candidate of my choice during election because I will be able to read the instruction concerning that.	95 (47.5)	80 (40)	14 (7)	11 (5.5)	200 (100)	3.3	2
Literacy education made me a passionate advocate for the education of my children	120 (60)	68 (34)	5 (2.5)	7 (3.5)	200 (100)	3.51	7
As a result of my literacy level, I have been involved in decision making processes in my community and at work place.	107 (53.5)	79 (39.5)	7 (3.5)	7 (3.5)	200 (100)	3.43	5
Literacy knowledge aids acquisition of vocational skills.	116 (58)	58 (29)	14 (7)	12 (6)	200 (100)	3.39	3
Women who have acquired basic literacy level function better in their respective field of endeavours.	108 (54)	72 (36)	7 (4.5)	11 (5.5)	200 (100)	3.39	3
Literacy education changes women social status positively.	125 (62.5)	54 (27)	8 (4)	13 (6.5)	200 (100)	3.46	6

Table 2 above depicts responses to impact of literacy on women. Literacy making women passionate advocates of their children's education ranked highest with a score of 7. Ranking next to that is the impact of literacy on changing the social status of women positively with a score of 6. The impact of literacy on decision making comes closely with a score of 5.

Both acquisition of basic literacy helping women function in their respective fields of endeavour and acquisition are ranked same with a score of 3. Impact of literacy on the election of choice candidates ranked 2, while ability to gain employment ranked 1.

Research Question Three: What are the factors militating against women literacy?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total %	Mean Rank	Ranking
Literacy programme consumes much time than I expected.	60 (30)	48 (24)	48 (24)	44 (22)	200 (100)	2.62	7
There is no literacy class becomes barrier to me.	51 (25.5)	36 (18)	48 (24)	65 (32.5)	200 (100)	2.37	4
Distance of the literacy class becomes barrier to me.	44 (22)	45 (22.5)	51 (25.5)	60 (30)	200 (100)	2.37	4
I don't like the way adult learners are being treated.	41 (20.5)	43 (21.5)	52 (26)	64 (32)	200 (100)	2.31	6
I always feel ashamed to be in literacy class because of age.	32 (16)	39 (19.5)	51 (25.5)	78 (39)	200 (100)	2.13	3
I prefer going for my business to attending literacy class	25 (12.5)	36 (18)	56 (28)	83 (41.5)	200 (100)	2.02	1
The demand of my family makes me to become truant in literacy programmes	26 (13)	3 (19.5)	5 (2.5)	84 (42)	200 (100)	2.04	2

Table 3: Table showing the factors militating against women literacy

This table 3 depicts opinion of respondents to factors militating against women participating in literacy programmes. Ranking highest among these factors is the issue of time with a score of 7.. Improper treatment of adult learners comes next with a score 6.

Next to that is the unavailability of literacy centres in respondents' immediate community and distance of programmes to respondents immediate community with a score of 4 respectively.

Shame of participating in programme because of age ranks 3, family demands occupying the learners' time ranks with a score of 2. Finally demands of business ranks lowest with a score of 1.

Research Question 4: What roles do spouses play in women acquiring literacy?

Table 4: Table showing the roles partners play in respondents' acquisition.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total %	Mean Rank	Ranking
My spouse ensures that I have enough literacy materials.	121 (60.5)	40 (20)	13 (6.5)	23 (13)	200 (100)	3.28	6
My spouse does not support my going to literacy class; it has constituted problems in my family.	46 (23)	31 (15.5)	53 (26.5)	70 (35)	200 (100)	2.74	1
My spouse shows interest in literacy acquisition and this motivate me.	104 (52)	59 (29.5)	19 (9.5)	18 (9)	200 (100)	3.25	3
My spouse proves finance to facilitate the programme.	111 (55.5)	45 (22.5)	28 (14)	16 (8)	200 (100)	3.26	5
My spouse gain support for family finance.	99 (49.5)	62 (31)	29 (14.5)	10 (5)	200 (100)	3.25	3
Spouse gave permission to attend in order for me to assist children with home work.	113 (56.5)	56 (28)	19 (9.5)	12 (6)	200 (100)	3.35	7
I enjoy the cooperation of my spouse throughout the period of literacy acquisition education.	109 (54.5)	50 (25)	18 (9)	23 (11.5)	200 (100)	3.25	2

Table 4, depicts roles spouses play in women literacy acquisition and participation in literacy programmes. At the top of this item is spousal support given in order to help with children's homework it ranks 7 next to it provision of literacy materials ranking 6, provision of tuition finance for participation which ranks 5. Both show of interest by spouse to acquire literacy and support provided for family finance rank equal 3, cooperation and support provided by spouse throughout the course of literacy programme ranks 2. Finally, lack of support from spouse ranks 1 which implies that most learners agreed that their spouses support them in various ways and this support is meaningful and has significant implications for their learning.

Discussion of Findings

Why women need literacy

The findings on table 1 interpretation of the table 1 indicated that the highest need of women for participating in literacy programme is both self-reliance and self-independence. Self-reliance is economic in nature. Their ability to take control of the economic situations in their homes and this is very much related to the findings of Moduomogu(2012), where the study revealed that the participants (women) greatest regret of not being educated was adverse effect illiteracy had on their lives was not being financially independent. The implication of this is that more literacy programmes must include income-generating activities. This is likely to stimulate persistence and motivation to

complete the programme. Also, inclusion of income generating activities in literacy programmes could help in getting more people to undertake the literacy training and acquisition of the needed skills. According to UNESCO, (2000) since literacy level correlates with personality development and economic emancipation, programmes must target relevance, that is, adult literacy programmes must attend to the represented needs of women. These needs are usually varied among women, depending on age, economic status, exposure and opportunities. Therefore, programme providers must endeavour to take inventory of needs at the onset of any literacy programme and make efforts to meet these needs. This is when literacy can become transformative and women can begin to make real changes in their communities.

According to Moduomogu, (2012) when adult literacy programmes is premeditated on identified learning needs, it goes beyond the acquisition of conventional literacy and extends to skill-oriented literacy which is characterized by the ability to solve the demands and challenges of everyday life. Women want financial independence, this makes them more respectable members of their homes and society at large. Also, it makes them less vulnerable and gives them a voice.

Impact of Literacy on Women

The response of most women in this study is corroborated across literature. On table2, we see that literacy made most of the women passionate advocates of their children's education. A report from

the Middle East and Africa reports quite similarly in this direction, that children, especially daughters of educated women are more likely to be enrolled in school, (Roudi-Fahimi & Moghadam, 2003). Most women believe literacy education changes their social status positively. Stromquist (1995); Egbo, (2000) in Olomukoro (2012) reported that literacy participating in literacy programmes increases self-esteem of those who undertook it. Developing a sense of confidence and self-esteem of one's worth can be considered a personal condition that precedes social and political action. Women are no longer without a voice when they have acquired literacy. This often is the main reason a lot of men oppose women participation in programmes. They consider them now outspoken and rebellious. It is for this reason that the advantages of women participation in literacy programmes should be promoted among their spouses. Making men understand the greater good literacy acquisition can do in supporting family income, family health, children's education and the general well-being of the family.

The third highest ranking item is in the area of decision making at home, community and workplace. This is corroborated by Stromquist (2006) that literacy skills are fundamental to informed decision-making and personal empowerment, active and passive participation in local, global and social community. In addition, EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2008) pointed out that literacy increases women

participation in both private and public spheres as well as in household decision making, community affairs and as active citizens in national life.

This is also supported by Freire and Mezirow's transformative approach to literacy which is centred on conscientization (Freire, 1972). It is a problem-centred approach to individual emancipation. Conscientization moves an observer, an inactive member of a community, through the tool of dialogue to a position of reflection which brings him or her to a point of realization of self and how he can be a change agent as he engages in critical thinking. Literacy must become a tool to enlighten and empower women to take control of their lives

Factors militating against women participating in literacy programmes

Literacy programmes consumption of much time carried the highest point. This is a given considering the fact that most women are very busy. This is corroborated by many past studies. Women's roles in their respective families, both nuclear and extended are enormous. It is for this reason programme flexibility is advocated. It should be a possibility for women to patronize literacy centres at their convenience but this is not yet possible as adult education programmes are run as appendages of the formal school system. Lack of classrooms and distance to centres/classrooms carry the next highest point. In Nigeria, most adult literacy programmes are run in government primary schools and such schools are often far from residential

areas. This is very evident mostly in the rural areas where classrooms are usually in need of major repair. Most obvious to the eyes are broken furniture, rooms that are poorly ventilated and where there is ventilation the windows are broken. These are major discouragements for learners patronizing literacy programmes. A study conducted by Adedokun(2010) on the physiological and psychological implications of using formal school texts and learning environment for adult learners in literacy programmes revealed that adult learners are demoralized in poor learning contexts. In that study, learners described their idea of what good and suitable classrooms should look like. This study also revealed that learners desire a flexible programme suitable to their lifestyles which they believe can help to reduce attrition. It is also their opinion that learning centres should be close to work and homes. For women, proximity to learning centres remains a major impetus to learning. Most women work from home as traders, food sellers or processors, it will be very helpful if centres are close to these two places where they spend most of their life time.

Some of the women complained about how they are treated in literacy programmes. This is a facilitator-related factor. A lot of facilitators are primary school teachers or retired school teachers who lack training in the psychology of adult learners. Facilitators are drafted on voluntary basis and paid very little honorarium to teach adult learners. Their lack of training on how to relate, or lack of facilitation skills oftentimes discourage

learners from persisting to completion of programme.

Spousal roles in women acquisition of literacy

Most of the spouses gave support to their wives with the belief women can help with children's homework, thereby contribute to children's educational advancement. The reason is however instrumental not necessarily for the personal growth of the women concerned but for the general good of the family and children in particular.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that women needs are peculiar and these needs border on the roles they perform or are expected to perform at home as key players in the home management, rearing of children and in the society. Although participation in literacy programme is targeted to both men and women, but women need it more compared to their male counterparts. This therefore calls for premeditated women literacy programmes which would help them develop skills in the area of self-reliance. Programmes which target improvements in the areas of self-reliance, self-dependence, economic generating programmes, and delivery of content that are school-like and are helpful to women in improving their children/ward educational endeavors, and family health life.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommendations are considered necessary:

- a) Programmes targeted towards women should include income generating activities among others.
- b) Where possible, communities, local authorities and donor agencies should endeavor to provide essential facilities to assist literacy centres. Educational materials which include blackboard, posters, text and writing materials can be supplied or solicited from local authorities, donors, philanthropists and international development partners.
- c) Facilitators must be trained regularly in the art of teaching the adult. This should be done by state agencies on a more regular basis.
- d) Alternative source(s) of funding adult education in communities must be sought from companies as their corporate social responsibility.
- e) There is need to begin to seek more flexible adult education programmes where learners have freedom of choice in terms of timing and location. This can be made possible by local authorities who have direct control of town halls, Obas' palaces, and other common facilities available to them.

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