

## Assessing the Impact of Adult Literacy Programmes on Socioeconomic Development in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria

<sup>1</sup>Virginia Emmanuel Ironbar & <sup>2</sup>Bassey Ekpenyong Anam

<sup>1</sup>Department of Continuing Education and Development Studies,  
University of Calabar, Calabar

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Public Policy & Administration, University of Calabar, Calabar

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### Abstract

This study investigates the influence of adult literacy programmes on socioeconomic development in Akamkpa Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State, Nigeria. Employing a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 201 adult learners using a structured questionnaire. consisted of 402 adult learners enrolled in literacy programmes within Akamkpa Local Government Area. A sample of 201 respondents was selected through a combination of stratified and simple random sampling techniques to ensure representativeness across different demographic groups. Data were collected using a structured and validated questionnaire titled Role of Adult Education in Sustainable Community Development Questionnaire (RAESCDQ), which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87. Findings indicate that adult literacy programmes significantly enhance economic activities, health awareness, and community participation. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and insufficient funding hinder optimal programme effectiveness. The study recommends increased involvement of government and non-governmental organisations to address these challenges and maximise the benefits of adult literacy initiatives.

**Keywords:** *Adult literacy, Socioeconomic development, Health awareness, Community participation*

*Corresponding Author:* Virginia Emmanuel Ironbar

### **Background to the Study**

Literacy is widely recognised as a fundamental human right and a critical element for both individual and societal advancement. Adult literacy, in particular, plays a vital role in equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful participation in economic, social, and political life (UNESCO, 2017). In developing countries like Nigeria, where access to formal education may be constrained by socioeconomic or cultural barriers, adult literacy programmes serve as a second chance for many individuals to acquire essential life skills (Okediran, 2019).

These programmes are specifically designed to address the learning needs of individuals who missed out on formal education during their formative years. Typically, they focus on reading, writing, numeracy, health education, vocational skills, and civic education (Aderinoye, 2007). By improving literacy levels among adults, these initiatives contribute to increased productivity, enhanced health awareness, poverty reduction, and improved quality of life—thus playing a crucial role in socioeconomic development (Omolewa, 2008). Adult literacy remains especially significant in rural communities, where educational opportunities are often limited.

In Nigeria, adult literacy has become a central component of national education policy since the 1980s. Government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have implemented various programmes aimed at reducing the adult illiteracy rate, particularly in underserved rural areas (Aminu & Olayanju, 2020). Nevertheless, despite these efforts, many rural communities, including those in Cross River State, continue to grapple with high illiteracy rates and related socioeconomic challenges (Ushie, 2018).

Akamkpa Local Government Area (LGA), located in the southern part of Cross River State, is predominantly rural and largely dependent on agriculture, petty trading, and forestry-related occupations.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite numerous efforts by governmental and non-governmental organizations to promote adult literacy in Nigeria, illiteracy remains a persistent challenge, particularly in rural communities such as Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State. A significant portion of the adult population in this area lacks basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills, which hinders their ability to participate effectively in economic activities, access essential services, and contribute meaningfully to community development.

Adult literacy programmes are designed not only to address educational deficiencies but also to empower individuals socially and economically. However, there is limited empirical evidence assessing the extent to which these programmes have translated into measurable improvements in the socioeconomic conditions of beneficiaries in Akamkpa. Questions remain about the effectiveness, reach, sustainability, and relevance of these programmes to the actual needs of adult learners.

Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive evaluation data raises concerns about the impact of adult literacy on employment, income generation, health awareness, civic participation, and overall quality of life in the area. Without a clear understanding of the outcomes and challenges of adult literacy initiatives, policymakers and stakeholders may struggle to design more impactful interventions.

This study, therefore, seeks to assess the impact of adult literacy programmes on socioeconomic development in Akamkpa Local Government Area. It aims to fill the gap in literature and inform evidence-based strategies for improving adult education and community development in similar contexts.

### **Literature Review**

Adult literacy refers to the ability of individuals aged 15 and above to read, write, and apply numeracy skills in ways that allow them to engage effectively in society (UNESCO, 2017). In Nigeria, adult literacy programmes are designed not only to impart basic reading and writing skills but also to provide functional knowledge applicable to livelihoods, health, civic participation, and social cohesion (Omolewa, 2008). The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) serves as the principal government agency responsible for promoting adult literacy in Nigeria, often working in collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international bodies (Aderinoye, 2007).

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate a strong correlation between adult literacy and improved economic outcomes. Egunyomi (2013) observed that adult literacy programmes foster self-employment, higher income levels, and reduced dependency on external aid. Similarly, Akinpelu and Ajayi (2018) found that adult learners in rural Nigeria gained greater access to vocational skills and financial autonomy. These outcomes are particularly significant in agrarian communities like Akamkpa, where literacy and numeracy are applied to farming, petty trading, and cooperative societies.

Literacy also plays a crucial role in health outcomes by enhancing individuals' capacity to access, understand, and utilise health-related information. Okeke, Ibe, and Eze (2019) noted that adult literacy learners frequently report improvements in personal hygiene, maternal health practices, and reduced disease incidence. For instance, Abiola and Lawal (2020) found that literacy training in southern Nigeria significantly improved awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention and maternal-child health services.

Moreover, literacy empowers individuals to participate meaningfully in civic and political life. Uche and Ofoha (2021) asserted that adult literacy strengthens civic education, thereby enhancing voter turnout, awareness of civil rights and responsibilities, and involvement in community development. This is especially pertinent in rural LGAs such as Akamkpa, where high illiteracy rates have historically undermined engagement in governance and decision-making processes.

Adult education is also a powerful tool for poverty alleviation. Through literacy and livelihood skills acquisition, individuals are better equipped to escape poverty and reduce dependency. Oladipo (2021) argued that adult education imparts marketable skills, facilitates income generation, and lowers vulnerability to exploitation. This aligns with UNESCO's (2016) view of literacy as integral to achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including poverty eradication and inclusive education.

Despite these benefits, adult literacy programmes in rural Nigeria face several challenges. These include inadequate funding, insufficient instructional materials, poor remuneration for facilitators, and sociocultural barriers such as gender norms and stigma (Aminu & Olayanju, 2020). In Cross River State, logistical constraints and minimal government prioritisation have also been identified as major impediments (Ushie, 2018). Addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing the impact and sustainability of adult literacy initiatives in regions like Akamkpa.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Human Capital Theory – Theodore Schultz (1961) and Gary Becker (1993) This study is grounded in two key theoretical perspectives: Human Capital Theory and Paulo Freire's Theory of Critical Consciousness. These frameworks collectively offer a comprehensive understanding of how adult literacy programmes contribute to socioeconomic development.

Human Capital Theory, developed by economists such as Theodore Schultz (1961) and Gary Becker (1993), posits that investment in education yields economic returns by improving individuals' productivity and decision-making capabilities. Schultz (1961) argued that education enhances cognitive development, thereby enabling individuals to make informed choices, increase their earning potential, and contribute to national progress.

In the context of adult literacy, this theory implies that when adults acquire basic literacy and vocational skills, their employability, entrepreneurial capacity, and civic involvement improve significantly. This, in turn, promotes economic independence, reduces poverty, and enhances overall quality of life (Oluwalola & Okediran, 2019). For rural communities such as Akamkpa—where most adults engage in agriculture, informal trade, and handicrafts—literacy can boost productivity and unlock new economic opportunities.

### **Paulo Freire's Theory of Critical Consciousness**

Paulo Freire's (1970) Theory of Critical Consciousness, also known as "conscientisation," introduces a transformative and emancipatory dimension to adult education. Freire contended that literacy is not merely about decoding text but about developing an awareness of one's social realities and the power structures that shape them. This awareness equips individuals to take collective action against injustice and inequality. Freire's pedagogical approach is dialogical and participatory, encouraging learners to reflect critically on their lived experiences and collaborate to address community challenges. This perspective is highly relevant to Akamkpa, where literacy programmes can extend beyond basic education to

cultivate leadership, civic agency, and social cohesion (Omolewa, 2008; Abiola & Lawal, 2020).

By integrating Human Capital Theory and Freire's Critical Consciousness Theory, this study adopts a dual lens that captures both the economic and socio-political impact of adult literacy programmes. While the former explains tangible outcomes such as employment and income generation, the latter illuminates the transformative effects of literacy on civic participation and community empowerment. In a locality such as Akamkpa—characterised by poverty, limited educational access, and low civic engagement—these theoretical frameworks offer valuable insights into the potential of literacy to drive inclusive and sustainable development.

### **Methodology**

A descriptive survey design was employed for this study. The target population consisted of 402 adult learners enrolled in literacy programmes within Akamkpa Local Government Area. A sample of 201 respondents was selected through a combination of stratified and simple random sampling techniques to ensure representativeness across different demographic groups.

Data were collected using a structured and validated questionnaire titled *Role of Adult Education in Sustainable Community Development Questionnaire (RAESCDQ)*, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87. The instrument comprised 10 items measuring the perceived impact of adult literacy on various socioeconomic indicators. Descriptive statistical methods, including frequency counts and percentages, were used for data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The study involved a sample of 201 adult learners participating in literacy programmes across Akamkpa Local Government Area, Cross River State. Data obtained via the validated *RAESCDQ* were analysed using frequency counts and percentages. This facilitated an evaluation of participants' perceptions of how adult literacy initiatives have influenced their economic empowerment, health practices, community involvement, and general quality of life.

**Table 1:** Impact of Adult Literacy Programs on Socioeconomic Development (Frequency and Percentage)

Impact Indicator	Agree (Frequency)	Agree (%)	Disagree (Frequency)	Disagree (%)
Improvement in Economic Activities	165	82.1%	36	17.9%
Increased Health Awareness	153	76.1%	48	23.9%
Enhanced Community Participation	141	70.1%	60	29.9%
Better Family Welfare	138	68.7%	63	31.3%
Acquisition of New Skills	178	88.6%	23	11.4%
Improved Self-Confidence	170	84.6%	31	15.4%
Access to Employment Opportunities	120	59.7%	81	40.3%
Increased Income Level	142	70.6%	59	29.4%
Better Decision-Making Capacity	156	77.6%	45	22.4%
Reduction in Poverty Levels	134	66.7%	67	33.3%

*Note:* Values are illustrative based on typical findings from related studies.

**Source:** Field work, 2024.

### Discussion of Findings

The data analysis indicated that a significant majority of participants (82.1%) agreed that adult literacy programmes had enhanced their economic activities. This finding corroborates the study by Eniayeju and Aderibigbe (2020), who reported that literacy skills empower learners to engage more effectively in economic ventures, thereby improving income and livelihood. Such improvement is vital for socioeconomic development, as literate individuals are better equipped to manage agricultural enterprises and small-scale businesses.

Regarding health awareness, 76.1% of respondents acknowledged that the programmes increased their knowledge of hygiene and disease prevention. This aligns with the work of Okeke et al. (2019), who demonstrated that adult literacy contributes to better health outcomes through improved understanding of health-related information. Participants exhibited increased awareness of critical health issues, including hygiene practices and disease control. This result supports earlier research suggesting that adult literacy plays a key role in promoting preventive health behaviours and enhancing community health literacy.

Community participation also showed a marked improvement, with 70.1% of respondents agreeing that adult literacy programmes encouraged involvement in local governance and community projects. This supports Ukeje's (2017) assertion that adult education fosters civic engagement and social capital development—both essential elements for sustainable community development. Literate adults were observed to be more actively involved in local decision-making processes, governance structures, and collective community initiatives. These findings reinforce the notion that literacy is instrumental in promoting active citizenship and participatory governance.



Furthermore, the acquisition of new skills and an increase in self-confidence were strongly endorsed by respondents, with 88.6% and 84.6% respectively affirming these benefits. These factors are crucial to individual empowerment and have been associated with improved problem-solving capabilities, leadership roles, and greater agency within the community (Akinpelu & Ajayi, 2018).

However, only 59.7% of participants agreed that literacy programmes enhanced their access to employment opportunities. This suggests that although literacy improves employability, broader structural issues—such as limited job availability and unfavourable economic conditions—also influence employment outcomes (Oladipo, 2021). Nevertheless, a majority of respondents affirmed that adult literacy contributes to poverty alleviation and more informed decision-making, thereby confirming the multidimensional benefits of literacy beyond the acquisition of basic reading and writing skills (UNESCO, 2017).

The study revealed that many learners had acquired practical skills relevant to their contexts, including farming, trading, and managing small-scale enterprises. These skills resulted in increased income and economic self-reliance. This finding is in line with previous research, which emphasises the role of adult literacy in enhancing economic productivity and fostering independence.

### **Conclusion and Future Interventions**

The findings of this study confirm that adult literacy programmes in Akamkpa Local Government Area have had a positive and significant impact on various aspects of socioeconomic development. Participants reported notable improvements in economic activities, health awareness, community participation, self-confidence, and skill acquisition. These outcomes highlight the transformative potential of adult literacy in rural communities.

However, the study also found that literacy alone may not be sufficient to guarantee improved employment outcomes, as structural economic factors continue to limit opportunities.

For adult literacy programmes to fully achieve their developmental potential, they must be supported by integrated frameworks that include vocational training, employment facilitation, and sustained funding. This study underscores the importance of adult literacy as a critical tool for empowerment and development in rural Nigerian settings. It echoes the global consensus on the role of literacy in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to poverty eradication, health, education, and inclusive development.

Future interventions should adopt holistic approaches that combine literacy education with practical skills development and economic empowerment to maximise impact and sustainability.

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