Perceived Challenges to Effective Participation of Imo State Rural Women in Literacy Programmes

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Abstract
This paper investigated the perceived challenges to effective participation of rural women aged 20 to 50 years in literacy programmes in Imo state. The study adopted a survey research design. Four research questions guided the study. A researcher made instrument titled questionnaire for perceived challenges to rural women’s participation in literacy programme (QPCRPLP) was used. It was a 20 item questionnaire supplemented with oral interview. The instrument was validated by two experts in Adult and Non-Formal Education and an expert in Measurement and Evaluation. Cronbach Alpha measure of internal consistency was used to obtain a reliability coefficient of 0.85, 0.81, 0.81 and 0.85 for each of the four sections of the study (socio-cultural, economic, psychological and curriculum related challenges) respectively. The study involved 240 respondents selected through stratified random sampling technique from 27 registered women organizations in Imo state. Mean scores were used in analyzing the research questions. Findings among others revealed that the major challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programme include domestic burden, financial constraints, curriculum related challenges, problems of self-concept and social commitments. Based on the findings recommendations were proffered.

Keywords: Challenges, Participation, Rural Women, Literacy Programme

Research paper

Introduction
Education has been acknowledged as a panacea to all social ills and an indispensable tool for sustainable national development. Hence any nation that still has significant percentage of illiterate citizens is perceived as lagging behind in the development race. This underscores the imperativeness of the quest for the attainment of education for all (EFA) objectives. To this effect multifarious strategies have been mapped out to ensure that everyone gets educated, including the physically challenged, nomads and the vulnerable and marginalized group in the society. Rural women who were not opportune to be formally educated in their youth are among the beneficiaries of such strategies which include literacy education. Awe (1990) asserted that women are managers of home as they plan, organize, direct and coordinate all
resources at home. Rural women by implication play similar roles but in the absence of literacy education such functions become difficult and unproductive.

Literacy education programme is one of the programmes designed by the Federal Government of Nigeria in the National Policy of Education, for adults and youths who did not have the advantage of formal education or dropped out from primary school (FGN, 2004). Literacy education programmes include basic literacy, post literacy and functional literacy programmes. Basic literacy programme is a foundation programme for lifelong learning meant to equip recipients with basic skills of reading, writing and calculation. Post literacy programme is a step further to equip those who completed basic literacy programme with additional knowledge and skills for adaptation and continuity of their education if they so wish. According to National Commission for Mass Education (NMEC), (2010) basic literacy is an equivalent of primary one to three in the formal setting whereas post literacy is an equivalent of primary four to six in the formal school setting. It is expected that the completion of basic and post literacy programmes would equip the recipient with enough literacy skills for effective societal function. Alternatively, one can still continue one’s academic pursuit through remedial studies to higher education. Functional literacy on the other hand is work related literacy which refers to the ability to apply the literacy skills to one’s work. Obidiegwu, (2013) asserts that the content of functional literacy includes skills, knowledge, values and attitudes required by people to be able to survive and develop their capacities in their areas of work or other areas relevant for self-reliant skills.

The establishment of adult literacy classes in all the states of the federation is geared towards the attainment of the literacy skills as explained above. However, the patronage given to these programmes by rural women is minimal compared to their numerical strength. The United Kingdom Department for International Development (2012), asserted that 54,000,000 of 80,200000 Nigerian women live and work in the rural areas. This implies that 67.33% of women are rural dwellers. Researches (FAO, 2014, Ngwu, 2006) have also shown that majority of these rural women are illiterates. In other words, development in the rural sector will not be complete without the education of these rural women. It had earlier been indicated in Education for All (EFA) Monitoring Report, (2006) that women account for 64% of the adults who cannot read or write with understanding. Similarly, Izuagba, Nwigwe and Nwanmuo (2014) noted that illiteracy keeps women marginalized and is a major obstacle to the reduction of extreme poverty in a technology driven world. Rural women’s participation in literacy programmes should be instrumental to liberating them from extreme poverty and improvement of their social status; however, they seem not to be actively involved. It is against this backdrop that the study tends to investigate the factors that militate against rural women’s active participation in literacy programmes in Imo state.

**Statement of the Problem**

Literacy education has been identified as an essential pre-requisite for women’s empowerment. Hence the acquisition of literacy skill is instrumental in the improvement of rural women and subsequently getting them out of poverty. However, rural women who constitute the bulk of illiterate rural population seem not to be actively involved in these programmes. These set of women have low status, lack means of livelihood, and are poor and voiceless in the society. In spite of the establishment of literacy classes in strategic places in the rural areas, the active involvement and retention of the rural women in Imo state in these programmes is not satisfactory compared to their numerical strength. Probably, these literacy
classes do not address their pressing needs or closely linked to their working lives for economic and social empowerment. On the other hand, it could be that women’s interest is being stalled by other challenges. Hence the present study tends to find out from the rural women factors militating against their participation in literacy programmes with a view to proffering solutions.

**Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the perceived challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo state, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated:

1. The socio-cultural related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo State, Nigeria;
2. The economic related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo State, Nigeria;
3. The psychological related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo State, Nigeria;
4. The curriculum related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo State, Nigeria.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What are the socio-cultural related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo State, Nigeria;
2. What are the economic related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo State, Nigeria;
3. What are the psychological related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo State, Nigeria;
4. What are the curriculum related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo State, Nigeria.

**Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study will be beneficial to rural women, communities and all stakeholders involved in adult literacy education programmes. The findings of the study will reveal the socio-cultural, economic, psychological and curriculum related factors militating against rural women’s participation in literacy education programmes. This will equip the programme providers with authentic information as regards ineffective participation of rural women in the programme. This will therefore direct their attention in evolving appropriate strategies in solving the problems and securing active participation of rural women in literacy programmes. Rural women will benefit from this study in the sense that literacy programmes will be linked to their needs and also empower them for effective societal function. Furthermore, the findings from the study will add to existing literature on rural women as well as serve as framework for future researches on women and literacy education.

**Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. According to Ali, (2006) a descriptive design is mainly concerned with describing events as they are, without any manipulation of what caused the event or what is being observed. In addition, he further stated that a survey is a
A descriptive study which seeks or uses the sample data of an investigation to document, describe and explain what is in existent or non-existent on the present status of a phenomenon being investigated. The design is appropriate for this study, because it could be used to attain the purposes of the study by eliciting responses from the respondents on the factors militating against effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo State, Nigeria. The study was carried out in Imo state, Nigeria. It covers all the 27 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the state. The population of the study was all the rural women in the 27 registered women organizations (one organization from each LGA) in Imo state, Nigeria. (Source: Imo State, Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Owerri, 2014). The sample size for the study was 240 respondents. The researcher used stratified random sampling technique in the selection of the respondents. The 27 LGAs in the state were stratified into three according to the senatorial zones and two local government areas were selected from each zone. A total of 6 L.G.As were selected as follows: Oru-East LGA and Ideato South LGA from Orlu zone; Mbaitolu LGA and Ahiazu Mbaise LGA from Owerri zone; Onimo LGA and Obowu LGA from Okigwe zone. The selection of these LGAs was based on their rural attributes. 40 rural women were chosen from each LGA’s women organization making a total of 240 respondents used for the study. The breakdown of the respondents is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Composition of the sample based on the Local Government Areas and population of women organization used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senatorial Zone</th>
<th>L.G.As/POP</th>
<th>Headquarter</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orlu</td>
<td>Oru-East (254)</td>
<td>Omuma</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ideato South (251)</td>
<td>Dikenafi</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mbaitolu (260)</td>
<td>Nwaorieubi</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ahiazu (257)</td>
<td>Afor-Oru</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owerri</td>
<td>Ehime Mbano (248)</td>
<td>Ehime</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obowo (264)</td>
<td>Otukpo</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okigwe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The instrument used for this study was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled Questionnaire for Factors Militating against Rural Women’s Participation in Literacy Programme (QPCRPLP). The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part A sought to collect personal data on the respondents, while part B which has 20 items was arranged in four clusters to elicit information from rural women on the socio-cultural, economic, psychological and curriculum related factors militating against their effective participation in literacy programmes respectively. The QPCRPLP was structured on a four-point rating scale of strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by two experts in adult and non-formal education and an expert in measurement and evaluation to ensure relevance, adequacy and comprehensiveness of the items. The reliability of the instrument was established with a pilot test administered on 30 rural women drawn from a co-operative society in Oha-Ofia LGA in Abia state and their responses collected. Cronbach Alpha Measure of Internal consistency was used to analyze the data because it has to do with polychotomous items (Uzoagulu, 2011). A coefficient of 0.85, 0.81, 0.81 and 0.85 was produced respectively for each of the sections (A- Socio-cultural
factors, B- Economic factors, C- Psychological factors and D-Curriculum related factors) of the instrument. These indicated that the instrument was reliable to be used for the study. Copies of the 20 items of QPCRPLP were administered to 240 rural women in the 6 L.G.As used for the study.

The researcher involved a research assistant in the administration of the questionnaire in addition to herself. The research assistant was informed on how to distribute the questionnaire and when and how to collect them. A total of 211 copies (88%) of QPCRPLP were returned. Mean scores were used to analysis. The decision rule was that any range above 2.50 was agreed, while any range below 2.50 was disagreed y the respondents.

Results
This presented the results of data collected.

Research Question 1
What are the socio-cultural challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo state, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean ratings ($x$) of socio-cultural challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Socio-cultural challenges</th>
<th>$x$</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lack of encouragement from spouse</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Too much engagement with domestic chores</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Too much engagement with maternal care</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Too much engagement with social activities</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Too much engagement with farm work</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results in Table 2 indicate the responses of rural women on the socio-cultural challenges to their active participation in literacy. From the above, it is observed that the socio-cultural challenges to rural women’s participation in literacy programmes are; too much engagement with domestic chores 2.99, too much engagement with maternal care 3.09 and too much engagement with social activities 2.59. Lack of encouragement from spouse 2.05 and too much engagement with farm work 2.08 were not among the factors that hinder rural women from effective participation in literacy programme in Imo state.

Research Question 2
What are the economic related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo state, Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean ratings ($x$) of economic related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes.
Table 3 showed that, out of the 5 items, 6, 8 and 10 were rated 3.05, 3.13 and 2.98. That is to say that, rural women agreed that the economic related factors militating against their active participation in literacy programmes are low income, lack of money to pay fees and being busy with income generating activities. While items 7 and 9 with mean ratings of 2.09 and 2.01 disagreed that lack of money for materials and transport to literacy centers were among the economic related factors that militate against their active participation in literacy programmes.

Research Question 3
What are the psychological related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo state, Nigeria?

Table 4: Mean ratings (x) of psychological related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Psychological related challenges</th>
<th>x</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Women’s education end in kitchen</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Is too late to go to school</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The programme leads to abandonment of house-hold duties</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Educated women are arrogant</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>It’s hard to combine schooling and domestic roles</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results in table 4 indicate the responses of rural women on the psychological related challenges to their active participation in literacy. From the above, it is observed that the psychological related factors militating against rural women’s participation in literacy programmes were; too late to go school 2.59, the programme leads to abandonment of household duties 3.06 and it’s hard to combine schooling and domestic work 3.03. Women’s education ends in kitchen 2.05 and educated women are arrogant 2.01 were not among the factors that hinder rural women from effective participation in literacy programme in Imo state.

Research Question 4
What are the curriculum related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes in Imo state, Nigeria?

Table 5: Mean ratings (x) of curriculum related challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Curriculum related challenges</th>
<th>x</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Lack of money to buy materials</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Lack of money to pay fees</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Lack of transport money to literacy centers</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Busy with income generating activities</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table 5 shows that out of the 5 items on this section, three items; farness of the literacy center 3.05, unconducive learning environment 2.99 and irrelevance of learning experiences to learners needs 3.06 were agreed on by the respondents as the curriculum related challenges to their participation in literacy programmes in Imo State, Nigeria. On the other hand, the table also indicated that two items; inadequacy of learning facilities and ineffectiveness of the facilitators were not included in the curriculum related factors militating against rural women’s participation in literacy programmes.

Discussion of Findings
From table 2, the rural women agreed that the socio-cultural challenges to their effective participation in literacy programmes in Imo State, Nigeria were too much engagement in home chores, maternal care and social activities. This agreed with Awe, (1990) that women are managers of home who plan, direct and coordinate all resources at home. Traditionally, women’s roles are associated with domesticity and rearing of children, and women especially in the rural areas perceive these roles as sacro sanct. They work round the clock either nursing babies or doing one house chore or the other. If any time is squeezed out it will be used for social activities. Hence it is not an over statement to say that their engagement in home activities affect their active participation in literacy programmes.

From Table 3 above, the rural women agreed that the economic related challenges to their active participation in literacy programmes are low income, lack of money to pay fees and being busy with income generating activities. Danjuma, Mohammad and Alkali, (2013) noted that women are generally poor while International Labor Organization ILO (2008) opined that rural women are concentrated on micro-size, low productivity and low return activities. More often than not rural women’s participation in income generating activities are on subsistence basis. For instance, their agricultural practices are for family consumption and their business ventures are petty trading. These can only lead to low productivity and low income. Probably they perceive involvement in literacy programme as a distraction from income generating activities but in spite of their effort they remain poor because they are yet to learn modern ways of acquiring income generating skills. These attest to their low income level and being busy with income generating activities which affect their active participation in literacy programmes.

Table 4 shows that the psychological related challenges to rural women’s participation in literacy programmes have to do with their self-concept. Rural women perceive opportunity for schooling as being late, besides they have to abandon their house hold duties and/or combine schooling and domestic work. This implies that rural women have negative self-concept which tends to limit their potentials. McGraw (2008) posited that self-concept is a person’s composite or collective view of himself or herself across a multi-dimensional set of
specific precepts. In other words, rural women lack confidence in self-efficacy, they felt they may not be successful in literacy programmes when they combine such programmes with their traditionally assigned roles. In other words, this can be attributed to the inability of rural women to recognize their worth and capabilities.

In table 5, it is evident that the rural women agreed that three items; farness of the literacy center, unconducive learning environment and irrelevance of learning experiences to learner’s needs were the curriculum related challenges to their active participation in literacy programmes. This finding tends to agree with Obiediegwu (2013) that the laudable policies on literacy education have minimal impact on the recipients and wondered whether the content of the programmes actually addressed the needs of the recipients. Adult learners are motivated when the learning experience is relevant to their needs otherwise they may abandon the programme once their needs are not addressed. Besides, most literacy programmes take place in primary schools where adult learners are meant to sit on children’s seats to learn. These may hinder their participation in the programme.

Conclusion
This paper investigated perceived challenges to effective participation of rural women aged 20 – 50 years in literacy programmes in Imo state. The study adopted a survey research design. Four research questions guided the study. A researcher made instrument titled questionnaire for perceived challenges to rural women’s participation in literacy programme (QPCRPLP) was used. It was a 20 item questionnaire supplemented with oral interview. The study involved 240 respondents selected through stratified random sampling technique from 27 registered women organizations in Imo state. Mean scores were used in analyzing the research questions. Findings among others showed that major challenges to effective participation of rural women in literacy programme include domestic burden, financial constraints, curriculum related challenges, problems of self-concept and social commitments. Based on the findings recommendations were proffered. The limitation of the study was its inability to include urban women; hence, further researches are suggested to include urban women and another on rural men.

Recommendations
The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this research;
1. Agencies of adult and non-formal education in collaboration with the government should design programmes to sensitize the rural women on the importance of literacy education.
2. Adult literacy education programmes should be tailored to the needs of the rural women. This should be done after the identification of the needs of rural women through a need assessment process.
3. A cross section of rural women should be involved in designing the content/curriculum of literacy education programmes.
4. The government should assist in alleviating the time burden of rural women by formulating policies and designing programmes to sensitize the male folks to be part of home management activities. This will enable the rural women to have enough time to partake to other meaningful ventures that will improve their status.
5. The government should ensure that well equipped adult literacy centers are established in all rural communities to enable rural women participate in the programmes with less stress.
6. Vocational skills acquisition should be included in the learning experiences in literacy centers to ensure functional literacy of the rural women as well as have opportunity to generate income through the learnt skills.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The Author(s) Declared No Potential Conflicts of Interest with Respect to the Research, Authorship, and/or Publication of this Article.

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**Biography**

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