

Exploring Meaningful Access for Women Education in Nigeria: A Case Of Imo State

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Abstract

The study on exploring meaningful access for women education was carried out in Imo state of Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the actual implementation of the programme of women education as provided by the Federal Government of Nigeria. 240 respondents were selected as study sample from a population of 2409. A structured questionnaire was administered to respondents and the data generated was analysed using mean ratings and the standard deviation. The results of the analysis revealed that: there was absence of physical facility requirements specifically provided for women education in the communities; there was no administrative framework to coordinate the programme; there was poor attendance and participation of the women in the programme while there was outright lack of transition of successful learners to the next level. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made: that the government should provide enabling physical facilities such as buildings, furniture and learning aids to encourage the learners; there should be administrative framework to coordinate the programme while effective supervision and inspection should be adopted to ensure enrolment, participation and transition of learners from one level to the other.

Key words: Meaningful access; Women education; Illiteracy

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INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian society according to the United Nations survey (UNDP, 2013) shows a trend of population explosion since independence in 1960 with a majority of the population at the rural areas. Damilola (2012) reported that out of sixty (60) million illiterate Nigerians, sixty percent are women. Indeed, the need for women education cannot be over-stressed because of the untold setback which the illiterate women suffer in the socio-economic and political affairs of the nation. The situation calls for more educated, dynamic and pragmatic women to facilitate capacity building in Nigeria. It is in line with the foregoing that Esu (2010) noted that women constitute the framework for sustainable development because apart from acquiring skills for economic well-being, women are closer to their children and when they acquire the skills from education, they teach their children thereby contributing to national development.

The illiterate women in Nigeria require out of school education in order to acquire requisite skills to tackle the challenges facing them. This is the major reason for placing priority for access for women education so as to reduce the illiteracy cycle.

The UNDP (2004) has classified Africa as one of the poorest and most illiterate continents of the world with a heavier burden of illiteracy borne by the women. The report went further to identify gender factor as one of the major challenges affecting school enrolment, retention and graduation. This situation is based on the finding that women are actually disadvantaged in schooling. Corroborating with the foregoing, West African Examination council (1999) revealed that differences exist between male and females in access to education and retention in schools and in performance in certain courses in favour of the males.

This desperate search for economic emancipation has become a distraction from attending formal education. There are other trade-cultural challenges that had

prevented the women from attaining formal education such as the shared beliefs and patterns of behaviour that prevail among the people.

Nigeria has over two hundred and fifty ethnic entities with differing cultures. Though every citizen belongs to one Nigeria, there is still allegiance to the different cultures one belongs because unconformity could result to varying degrees of consequences including the wrath of the gods. That is why most cultures see the men as superior to women which implicitly demands that the women should not be over-bearing or disrespectful to the men. In other to guide against the above situation, most cultures deny the women formal educational training thereby relegating them to the background.

Agabi and Ogah (2008) posited that the travails of the women are further compounded by the rapid technological facilities which are lacking in the rural areas and in the villages were the women are predominantly found. The near absence of electricity supply, good road network and internet services are some of the challenges against the women.

Presently, the federal Government of Nigeria FGN (2004) had reaffirmed its resolve towards the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in line with the world wide initiative for Education For All (EFA). The policy is aimed at meeting the learning needs of all citizens irrespective of culture or creed in order to accelerate national development. The universal basic education programme could be formal in the school system or non-formal out of school for those who could not make it during their school years. That is why the senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria passed the UBE Bill in the year 2000 to ensure free and compulsory basic education for all Nigerian citizens. However, Izuagba (2006) had observed that provision of universal compulsory basic education for all citizens' demand more than mere policy pronouncement, commitment to and actual realisation of such programmes remain the focus.

The illiterate women are citizens that their situation continuous to be precarious because they need to be assisted. That is why Agabi (2002) had described educational policy in Nigeria as a political function that is expected to influence the process, direction and dynamism of the basic education programme so as to reach to all citizens. He went further to state that educational policies in Nigeria had been truncated by a myriad of factors including: (i) weak legal framework, whereby the various state governments make educational policies that run at cross purposes to each other and with the federal government.

(ii) over-partisan which manifests in political inhibition where by political considerations overshadow mutual rational policies.

(iii) Administrative challenges which occur due to bureaucratic Red-tapism or frustration during policy implementations.

The above challenges point to the fact that though Nigeria has made series of educational policies to entrench access to basic education for all citizens. Efforts are yet to be made to create meaningful access to the illiterate women who are in their large numbers in the rural areas. It is expected that any meaningful access will manifest and the effect will be felt in the society through improved participation of the generality of the women in the socio-economic affairs of the country.

What this means is that, there should be a step further from policy pronouncement to physical access and participation of the women in the following areas:

Government should make conscious effort to anticipate requirements for women access for education and to plan towards providing such requirements.

Ensuring actual enrolment of the illiterate women for the programmes.

Ensuring their participation in learning through regular supervision and inspection.

Assessing their transition to the next level and progress report in line with stated objectives. The above criteria can be seen as the basic components of actually creating meaningful access for the education of the illiterate women among the citizenry.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is predicated on the general systems theory as reviewed by Okorie (2012). The general systems theory conceives a system as a whole, consisting of mutually interdependent parts. Each part contributes to the general goals of the system. This can be likened to the Nigerian society as an entity or system constituted of persons and groups who must be considered to be able to carry out their roles sufficiently so that the entire system can succeed. It is therefore necessary to attend to the various levels of the society as sub systems in order to synergize efforts to achieve common goal.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Very many women in the Nigerian society are not only marginalized but are also under represented due to illiteracy. There has also been public outcry on the increasing cases of illiteracy in the society. Many Scholars such as Okeke (2002) and Ike-Obioha (2015) believe that lack of meaningful access for women education results to wastage of potential human resources. There is urgent need to address the issue of illiteracy cycle in the Nigerian society. The authors decided to investigate the extent of provision of enabling environment to educate the illiterate women so that their education can also influence their children at homes.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Meaningful access: for purposes of this study, meaningful access depicts significant manifestation of the programme of women education. It implies the existence of physical access in the areas of the following;

Planning and assessment of programme requirements such as buildings, furniture, materials.

Ensuring participation of the women in learning

Evaluating progress and transition from one level to another.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the study is to assess the application of meaningful access on women education. Specifically, the study is poised to determine:

The extent of planning for women education through the provision of requisite facilities in the communities.

The availability of administrative framework to co-ordinate the activities of others.

The extent of actual enrolment and participation of the women.

The level of transition of successful learners to the next level.

Significance of the Study

The study will bring to limelight the fact that the Nigerian

Government has relied so much on policy pronouncement rather than actual implementation hence it will quicken the government actions for women education.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What physical facilities are available for women education in the communities?

Are there any administrative frameworks for conducting women education in the communities?

What is the level of attendance and participation of the women in the centres?

Are there transitions of successful trainees to another level of education?

METHOD

The study adopted the descriptive survey design because the study involved description of a phenomenon. Four research questions were posed to guide the study.

The population for the study consisted of all the uneducated women who attended the famous women 'August' general meeting in their respective communities in the year 2015 in Imo State, totalling 2409.

The stratified Random sampling technique was adopted to select 20 respondents from each selected community in the three Geo-political zones. The stratified random sampling technique was adopted because the three Geo-political zones in the state are not equal. Orlu

zone has 12 local government areas, Owerri zone has 09 local government areas while okigwe zone has 6 local government areas. A total sample size of 240 (10%) of the population were selected to express their opinion with the help of Research Assistants.

The research instrument (questionnaire) has two sections. Section A, was for background information while section B has 20-items in line with the research questions. The responses were weighed using a 4-point scale. A test-retest was carried out on the instrument to obtain the reliability coefficient using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of 0.66 and 0.65 respectively. Face and content validity were also applied.

The data was analysed using mean scores and standard deviation to derive answers to the research Questions.

RESULT

Research Question 1

What physical facilities are available for women education in the communities?

Table 1
The availability of physical resources for women education in the communities.

S/N	Items	N	X	SD	Decision
1.	Are there buildings/ accommodation created for women education in the community?	240	1.950	0.977	Rejected
2.	Are there furniture provided?	240	2.200	1.105	Rejected
3.	Are there learning material/ stationary provided?	240	1.826	1.860	Rejected
4.	Are there equipment provided to assist learning?	240	2.270	1.029	Rejected

Table 1 shows that the availability of physical resources for women education at the communities is generally not available. All the respondents were of the view that the physical facilities are either non-existent or in acute supply.

Research Question 2

Are there administrative frameworks for women education in the communities?

S/N	Items	N	X	SD	Decision
5.	Are there Administrative heads to link the centres to the state ministry of education?	240	2.750	1.117	Accepted
6.	Are the learners organized and coordinated?	240	2.150	1.113	Rejected
7.	Are there specification of responsibilities for the instructors in line with stated objectives?	240	2.975	0.965	Accepted
8.	Are there in-built devices for evaluation of learning?	240	2.489	0.432	Rejected

Table 2 shows moderate opinions on the presence of Administrative framework for women education in the

communities. Items Number 5 and 7 respectively, indicate the presence of Administrative framework for women education while items Number 6 and 8 stated otherwise.

Research Question 3

What is the level of attendance and participation of the women at the centres?

Table 3
The level of attendance and participation of the women at the learning centres?

S/N	Items	N	X	SD	Decision
9.	Are there intakes or enrolment of women at the learning centres?	240	2.850	0.913	Accepted
10.	Are the learners constructively engaged in the learning activities?	240	2.475	1.0029	Rejected
11.	Are the learners-socially acceptable needs and interests encouraged?	240	2.150	1.114	Rejected
12.	Are the learners motivated to learn?	240	2.200	1.105	Rejected

Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents did not affirm that there is enrolment and participation of women at the learning centres.

Research Question 4

Are there transition of the successful trainees from one level to the other at the centres?

Table 4
The evaluation, transition and turnover of successful learners to the next level.

S/N	Items	N	X	SD	Decision
13	Is there coordinated impact assessment of learning by government officials at the centres?	240	2.285	1.250	Rejected
14.	Is there regular evaluation for quality improvement by government officials?	240	2.476	1.030	Rejected
15.	Is there transition of successful learners to the next level of learning?	240	1.675	0.757	Rejected
16.	Is there an effort to minimize turnover or failures at the learning centres?	240	2.281	0.887	Rejected

Table 4 shows that all the respondents failed to uphold the idea that there is transition of successful trainees from one level to the other at the centres.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Based on the data analysis of the study, the following findings were arrived at:

There was absence of physical facilities for women education in the communities.

Though there was the existence of Administrative heads to link the women education centres as well as specification of responsibilities for instructors, there were scarcely other administrative frame works for women

education in the communities.

There was little or no attendance and participation of the women in the centres though there were cases of enrolments for the programme.

There was outright lack of transition of successful learners from one level to the other.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed a sad experience on the plight of the illiterate women in the Nigerian society. Akomolafe (2005) had stressed on the need for government to empower the women through education in order to get better jobs and to be set free from ignorance that pervade the society. The importance of educating the women is to integrate them effectively into the community life and to offer relief to the women folk who are most often inadequately represented, Enaohwo (2002).

One discouraging feature of the findings is the absence of physical facilities such as buildings or accommodation, furniture, equipment and learning materials specifically provided for women education. From the foregoing, it is tempting enough to belief that educational policies are vaguely stated without commensurate implementation.

The finding that there is no coordinated impact assessment and evaluation, suggests that there is no articulation in precise terms of the standard of performance and criteria to predict level of performance. Assessment of performance helps to appraise defined objectives of a programme. A programme such as women education cannot be achieved without assessing the level of performance at intervals so as to ensure transition of successful learners to the next level.

There is strong indication that the idea of women education in the Nigerian society is yet to receive the desired attention.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it can be reasonable to conclude that women education in Nigeria has not received meaningful attention from the government on one hand and the women on the other. The situation is characterized by blurred frame work of activities lacking the necessary requirements for women education. The result is that the women are not learning and the basic objective of empowering the women to be more productive to the society becomes a futile exercise.

RECOMMENDATION

It is imperative to recommend the following in providing a meaningful access for women education.

Provision of physical facilities for women education to encourage the learners.

Putting up administrative frame work in the

communities for women education.

Adopting effective supervision to ensure enrolment and participation of the women at the learning centres etc.

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