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IMPACT OF ADULT EDUCATION ON SOCIAL INCLUSION AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN SELECTED RURAL COMMUNITIES IN KWARA STATE

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Abstract

Adult Education serves as a catalyst for personal and societal transformation, empowering individuals to achieve their full potentials, participate meaningfully in their communities, and contribute to social and economic development thereby, champion social inclusion among women in rural communities. Thus, the paper focused on the impact of adult education on social inclusion and empowerment of women in selected rural communities in Kwara State. The objectives of the paper among others was to determine the available social inclusion programme that facilitates women empowerment programme in rural communities and ascertain the level of effectiveness of the social inclusion on women empowerment programme in rural communities in Kwara State, Nigeria. Findings from the analysed data revealed that adult education has significant impact on social inclusion and women empowerment programs in rural communities in Kwara State. Thus, recommendations provided includes; improve the reach and effectiveness of existing social inclusion and women empowerment programs by increasing resources and refining strategies based on regular evaluations and implementation of targeted interventions to overcome challenges such as limited access, socio-cultural barriers, and financial constraints.

Keywords: Adult Education, Social inclusion, Empowerment, Women & Rural Communities

Introduction

Adult education refers to the diverse range of formal and informal learning opportunities designed to meet the educational needs and goals of adults beyond traditional schooling age. It encompasses programs, courses, and activities aimed at fostering lifelong learning, skill development, personal enrichment, and social empowerment among adult learners. Adult education is a multifaceted field that encompasses a wide range of educational opportunities and programs tailored to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of adult learners beyond traditional schooling years. As defined by UNESCO (2021), adult education refers to the entire body of organized

educational processes, whatever the content, level, and method, whether formal or informal, that are recognized as education by the relevant national authorities, and which are entered by individuals normally beyond the age of compulsory schooling.

Social inclusion refers to the process of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their background, characteristics, or circumstances, have equal opportunities to participate fully in society and access its resources, services, and benefits (World Bank, 2020). Social inclusion encompasses efforts to remove barriers, reduce inequalities, and promote the active engagement and participation of marginalized and disadvantaged groups, including women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and other vulnerable populations (OECD, 2019). Social inclusion is not merely about integration or assimilation but emphasizes the recognition of diversity, respect for human rights, and the creation of inclusive environments that embrace and celebrate differences while promoting equal rights and opportunities for all members of society (UNESCO, 2019).

Women empowerment however refers to the process of enhancing women's agency, autonomy, and decision-making power, enabling them to assert their rights, access opportunities, and participate more fully in social, economic, and political life (Kabeer, 2020). Women empowerment encompasses efforts to challenge and overcome the structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that perpetuate gender inequalities and discrimination, thereby enabling women to exercise greater control over their lives, resources, and futures (UN Women, 2019). Women empowerment is not only essential for achieving gender equality but also contributes to broader development goals, including poverty reduction, improved health and education outcomes, and sustainable economic growth (Duflo, 2019). Investing in women's empowerment, societies can unlock the full potential of half of their population, fostering greater social cohesion, resilience, and prosperity for all members of society.

In light of the above challenges faced by women, adult education plays a crucial role in enhancing social inclusion and promoting women empowerment by providing marginalized and disadvantaged individuals, including women, with opportunities for lifelong learning, skill development, and capacity building (UNESCO, 2021). Through adult education programs, individuals who have been excluded from formal education systems due to socioeconomic factors, gender discrimination, or other barriers can acquire essential literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills that enable them to participate more fully in society (Field, 2020).

Promoting adult education is imperative for advancing social inclusion and women empowerment, as it serves as a catalyst for breaking down barriers, fostering inclusive societies, and empowering marginalized populations, including women. Expanding access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for adults, particularly those from underserved communities and marginalized groups, societies can create pathways for individuals to acquire essential skills, knowledge, and competencies that enable them to participate fully in economic, social, and political life (Field, 2020). In light of the aforementioned, the present study is of the interest of investigating the impact of adult education on social inclusion and empowerment of women in rural communities in Kwara State.

Statement of the Problem

Observations by earlier researchers (Mohammed, & Abdallah, 2017; Ogunyemi, 2022; Ojo, 2021) provide indications that in rural communities in Kwara State, challenges persist regarding the impact of adult education on social inclusion and the empowerment of women. Despite the implementation of adult education programs, marginalized communities, particularly women, still face barriers to accessing quality educational opportunities. Socioeconomic constraints, including poverty and lack of infrastructure, hinder participation in adult education initiatives, exacerbating existing inequalities and limiting the potential for social inclusion and women's empowerment.

Previous studies have shed light on the intersection of adult education, social inclusion, and women's empowerment in similar contexts. For instance, a study by Adeoye and Babalola (2018) examined the effectiveness of adult literacy programs in rural communities in Kwara State, highlighting the positive impact on participants' literacy levels but leaving gaps in understanding the broader social and economic outcomes, particularly concerning gender dynamics and empowerment. Similarly, Ojo (2020) explored the challenges faced by women in accessing adult education programs in rural communities, identifying issues such as limited resources, cultural norms, and family responsibilities, yet gaps persist in assessing the long-term impact on social inclusion and empowerment.

Review of Related Literature

Concept Adult Education in Nigeria

Adult education plays a pivotal role in promoting the social inclusion of women by providing opportunities for skill development, empowerment, and participation in social and economic activities (Fenwick, 2001). Through adult education programs, women gain access to formal and informal learning opportunities that enhance their knowledge, confidence, and agency, enabling them to actively engage in decision-making processes within their families, communities, and workplaces. Education has long been recognized as a powerful tool for advancing gender equality and empowering women to overcome social barriers and discrimination (UNESCO, 2020). Adult education initiatives specifically tailored to the needs and interests of women can address gender disparities in education, employment, and leadership, thereby fostering greater social inclusion and gender equity.

Moreover, adult education serves as a catalyst for economic empowerment among women by equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to pursue gainful employment, entrepreneurship, and income-generating activities (Rose, 2019). By providing training in areas such as literacy, numeracy, vocational skills, and financial literacy, adult education enhances women's economic independence and contributes to poverty reduction and sustainable development. Adult education promotes women's social inclusion by addressing social and cultural barriers that restrict their participation in public life and decision-making processes (UNESCO, 2020). Through community-based education programs, women have the opportunity to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, assert their rights, and advocate for gender-sensitive policies and programs that promote their inclusion and well-being.

Adult education contributes to the social inclusion of women by addressing barriers to access and participation in education and training, such as geographic isolation, lack of resources, and caregiving responsibilities (Fenwick, 2001). Flexible learning modalities, community-based programs, and support services tailored to the needs of women enable them to overcome these obstacles and engage fully in educational opportunities that enhance their social and economic well-being. Adult education empowers women to challenge discriminatory practices and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality and marginalization (Rose, 2000). It provides spaces for critical reflection, dialogue, and advocacy, adult education enables women to recognize their rights, assert their agency, and demand accountability from governments, institutions, and communities for addressing gender-based discrimination and injustice.

Concept of Social Inclusion of Women

Social inclusion of women refers to the process of ensuring that women have equal access to opportunities, resources, and rights in society, regardless of their social or economic status (Kabeer, 2019). It encompasses efforts to address systemic barriers, discrimination, and marginalization that hinder women's full participation and integration into various spheres of life. Social inclusion recognizes women as equal members of society and seeks to promote their empowerment, agency, and well-being (Sen, 2019). It entails creating environments that value diversity, respect human rights, and foster inclusive practices that enable women to exercise their capabilities and realize their potential. Social inclusion of women encompasses multiple dimensions, including economic, political, social, and cultural aspects of life (UN Women, 2019). It involves not only ensuring women's access to education, employment, and healthcare but also addressing social norms, stereotypes, and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality and exclusion. Women's social inclusion is closely linked to broader efforts to achieve gender equality and women's rights (Kabeer, 2019).

Women Empowerment

Women empowerment is a multifaceted concept that encompasses social, economic, and political dimensions aimed at enhancing the agency, autonomy, and equality of women in society (Kabeer, 2019). The emphasis on women empowerment is rooted in the recognition of women's rights as human rights and the acknowledgment of the structural inequalities and discrimination that women face globally (United Nations, 2021). Empowering women not only benefits individuals but also contributes to broader societal development by promoting gender equality, reducing poverty, and fostering inclusive and sustainable growth (World Bank, 2019). One key aspect of women empowerment is ensuring women's access to education and lifelong learning opportunities, which serves as a critical foundation for advancing gender equality and women's rights (UNESCO, 2019). Education empowers women by enhancing their knowledge, skills, and capabilities, enabling them to make informed decisions, pursue economic opportunities, and participate more fully in social and political life (Sen, 1999). By investing in girls' education and literacy programs, governments and organizations can break the cycle of poverty, improve health outcomes, and promote gender equality across generations.

Economic empowerment is another essential dimension of women empowerment, focusing on enhancing women's access to economic resources, opportunities, and

decision-making power (Kabeer, 2019). This involves promoting women's participation in the formal labor market, entrepreneurship, and income-generating activities, as well as addressing barriers such as gender wage gaps, discriminatory laws, and limited access to finance and property rights (World Bank, 2020). Economic empowerment enables women to achieve financial independence, support themselves and their families, and contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction.

Social empowerment focuses on challenging gender norms, stereotypes, and attitudes that perpetuate discrimination and inequality against women and girls (Kabeer, 2019). This involves promoting gender-sensitive norms and behaviors, challenging harmful practices such as child marriage and gender-based violence, and fostering supportive environments that promote women's rights and agency (UN Women, 2020). Health empowerment is essential for ensuring women's access to comprehensive healthcare services, reproductive rights, and sexual and reproductive health education (WHO, 2019). This involves addressing barriers such as lack of access to healthcare facilities, information, and resources, as well as addressing cultural taboos and stigma surrounding women's health issues.

Impact of Adult Education on Social Inclusion and Women Empowerment

Adult education has a profound impact on promoting social inclusion among women by providing them with opportunities for lifelong learning and skill development (Yadav, 2017). Through adult education programs, women from marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds gain access to formal and informal learning opportunities that empower them to actively participate in economic, social, and political life, thus reducing social exclusion and enhancing their sense of belonging and citizenship. Similarly, adult education plays a crucial role in addressing the barriers to social inclusion faced by women, such as poverty, illiteracy, and lack of access to resources and opportunities (Fenwick, 2001). By offering flexible learning modalities, community-based programs, and support services tailored to the needs of women, adult education enables them to overcome these obstacles, build their confidence and self-esteem, and engage more fully in their communities and society at large. Additionally, adult education promotes social inclusion among women by fostering a sense of empowerment, agency, and self-determination (UNESCO, 2020).

Moreover, adult education enhances social inclusion by promoting intercultural understanding, tolerance, and respect for diversity among women from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds (Rose, 2018). Providing opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and mutual learning, adult education breaks down stereotypes, prejudices, and barriers to social interaction, fostering greater solidarity, empathy, and social cohesion among women, regardless of their differences. In the same vein, adult education fosters social inclusion by promoting gender equality and women's rights as fundamental principles of human rights and social justice (UNESCO, 2020). By raising awareness of gender issues, challenging patriarchal norms and attitudes, and advocating for policy reforms and institutional changes, adult education contributes to creating more inclusive and gender-responsive societies that uphold the rights and dignity of all women, fosters social inclusion by promoting access to essential services and resources that improve women's health, nutrition, and overall quality of life (Fenwick, 2001).

Adult education enhances social inclusion by promoting economic empowerment and financial independence among women (UNESCO, 2020). Yadav, (2017) stressed that adult education contributes to women's empowerment by addressing barriers to access and participation in education and training (UNESCO, 2020). By offering flexible learning modalities, community-based programs, and support services tailored to the needs of women, adult education enables them to overcome obstacles such as geographic isolation, lack of resources, and caregiving responsibilities, empowering them to pursue their educational aspirations and achieve their full potential.

Studies on Adult Education and Women Social Inclusion

Access to adult education facilitates day-to-day living, and helps families and women businesses plan for everything from long-term goals to unexpected emergencies and can improve the overall quality of their lives. However, few of the empirical literatures were reviewed in this study.

Adebayo et al. (2021) conducted a review on the effectiveness of Adult Education programmes on women's socioeconomic development and social inclusion in Nigeria. The background of this review highlighted the need to understand how these programmes can enhance women's economic status and social inclusion. The objectives were to summarize existing research findings, identify gaps in the literature, and provide actionable recommendations for future initiatives. The methodology involved a systematic review of relevant studies, employing explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure comprehensive data analysis. The findings indicated that empowerment programmes significantly improve women's access to resources and decision-making power, ultimately leading to enhanced socioeconomic status and social inclusion. The conclusions emphasized the importance of literacy programmes that consider local contexts and the need for further research to explore long-term impacts.

Ogunyemi (2022) conducted a review focusing on the barriers to women's participation in empowerment programmes in Kwara State. The background of this review identified persistent challenges such as cultural norms, lack of access to information, and inadequate support systems. The objectives were to synthesize findings from various studies, highlight inconsistencies in current knowledge, and suggest strategies for overcoming these barriers. The methodology included a thorough literature search and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. The findings revealed that addressing cultural and systemic barriers is crucial for increasing women's participation in empowerment initiatives. The review concluded that community engagement and awareness campaigns are essential for fostering an inclusive environment that supports women's empowerment and all these could better facilitate through adult education programme.

Ibrahim (2023) explored the role of adult education in enhancing the effectiveness of empowerment programmes and social inclusion for women in Nigeria. The background of this review emphasized the critical link between education and empowerment, particularly in rural areas. The objectives included summarizing the influence of educational initiatives on women's socioeconomic development and identifying gaps in the current educational framework. The methodology involved a systematic analysis of

existing literature on educational empowerment. The findings indicated that educational programmes significantly contribute to women's empowerment by improving their skills and knowledge, which in turn enhances their economic opportunities. The conclusions highlighted the need for integrated educational strategies that align with empowerment programmes to maximize their effectiveness.

Ojo (2020) conducted a review on assessing the influence of adult education on women's empowerment in Nigeria. The background of this review focused on the increasing role of adult education institutions in providing financial resources to women entrepreneurs. The objectives were to evaluate the effectiveness of adult education in promoting women's economic independence and to identify challenges faced by women in accessing these financial services. The methodology involved a comprehensive review of studies related to adult education and women's empowerment. The findings revealed that while adult education has the potential to empower women economically, challenges such as high-interest rates and inadequate financial literacy hinder its effectiveness. The review concluded that improving financial literacy and providing supportive services are essential for enhancing the influence of adult education on women's empowerment.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of adult education on social inclusion and empowerment of women in rural communities in Kwara State.

Specifically, the study will seek to:

1. Determine the available social inclusion and women empowerment programme in rural communities in Kwara State
2. Ascertain the level of effectiveness of the social inclusion and women empowerment programme in rural communities in Kwara State.
3. Find out the impacts of adult education on the social inclusion and empowerment of women in rural communities in Kwara State.

Research Questions

The following questions have been raised to guide the study

1. What are the available social inclusion and women empowerment programme in rural communities in Kwara State?
2. What is the level of effectiveness of the social inclusion and women empowerment programme in rural communities in Kwara State?
3. What are the impacts of adult education on the social inclusion and empowerment of women in rural communities in Kwara State?

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive research design. This enables information to be obtained from respondents across different states. The population for the study comprises of all women in rural communities in Kwara State, simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 respondents to constitute the sample for the study. A well-structured questionnaire was used to elicit useful information for the study and face and content validity of the instrument was established by the experts in measurement and evaluation with a reliability index of 0.86. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency count percentage and mean score.

Data Analysis and Results

Answering of Research Questions

Research Question One:

What are the available social inclusion and women empowerment programme in rural communities in Kwara State?

Table 1: Descriptive Mean Score on Available Social Inclusion and Women Empowerment Programme

S/N	ITEMS	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Women Empowerment and Livelihood Programme	3.54	0.74	Moderate
2	Kwara State Women Empowerment Scheme (KWASE)	3.47	0.62	Moderate
3	Skill Acquisition and Empowerment Programme for Women (SKEPW)	3.44	0.82	Moderate
4	Women Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion Programme (WEFIP)	3.27	0.80	Moderate
5	Kwara State Gender Mainstreaming Programme (KSGMP)	3.25	0.69	Moderate

The table indicates that various social inclusion and women empowerment programs available in rural communities in Kwara State, are perceived as having a moderate level of effectiveness. Programs such as the Women Empowerment and Livelihood Programme (Mean = 3.54), Kwara State Women Empowerment Scheme (KWASE) (Mean = 3.47), and Skill Acquisition and Empowerment Programme for Women (SKEPW) (Mean = 3.44) are viewed positively but with room for improvement. The Women Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion Programme (WEFIP) (Mean = 3.27) and Kwara State Gender Mainstreaming Programme (KSGMP) (Mean = 3.25) also receive moderate ratings, suggesting that while these programs are valued, they may not fully meet the needs of women in the region. Overall, the moderate ratings across these programs highlight the need for enhanced strategies and implementation to better support women's empowerment and social inclusion in rural communities in Kwara State.

Research Question Two:

What is the level of effectiveness of the social inclusion and women empowerment programme in rural communities in Kwara State?

Table 2: Descriptive Mean Scores on Level of Effectiveness of the Social Inclusion and Women Empowerment Programme

S/N	ITEMS	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Women Empowerment and Livelihood Programme	3.25	0.85	Moderate
2	Kwara State Women Empowerment Scheme (KWASE)	3.25	0.85	Moderate

3	Skill Acquisition and Empowerment Programme for Women (SKEPW)	3.23	0.78	Moderate
4	Women Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion Programme (WEIFIP)	3.21	0.85	Moderate
5	Kwara State Gender Mainstreaming Programme (KSGMP)	3.18	0.85	Moderate

The table shows that the level of effectiveness of various social inclusion and women empowerment programs in rural communities in Kwara State, is rated as moderate. Programs such as the Women Empowerment and Livelihood Programme and the Kwara State Women Empowerment Scheme (KWASE), both with a mean of 3.25, are perceived as moderately effective. Similarly, the Skill Acquisition and Empowerment Programme for Women (SKEPW) (Mean = 3.23) and the Women Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion Programme (WEIFIP) (Mean = 3.21) receive moderate ratings, while the Kwara State Gender Mainstreaming Programme (KSGMP) is slightly lower at 3.18. These results indicate that while the programs are seen as contributing to social inclusion and women's empowerment, there is a consistent perception of moderate effectiveness, suggesting a need for improvement and further development to better achieve their objectives.

Research Question Three:

What are the impacts of adult education on the social inclusion and empowerment of women in rural communities in Kwara State?

Table 3: Descriptive Mean Scores on Impacts of Adult Education on the Social Inclusion and Empowerment of Women in Rural Communities in Kwara State

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Adult education programs empower women to participate in income-generating activities, enhancing their financial autonomy.	3.08	0.78	Agreed
2	Women develop improved decision-making skills through adult education, enabling them to advocate for their rights effectively.	3.01	1.08	Agreed
3	Participation in adult education leads to better health outcomes for women by providing them with essential health information and resources.	3.01	0.86	Agreed
4	Adult education encourages women to engage more actively in community development initiatives and decision-making processes.	2.85	0.80	Agreed
5	Adult education programs promote gender equality by providing women with equal opportunities for education and skill development.	2.77	1.03	Agreed

The table reveals that the impacts of adult education on the social inclusion and empowerment of women in rural communities in Kwara State are generally perceived as positive but with varying degrees of agreement. Adult education programs are

agreed upon to empower women for income-generating activities (Mean = 3.08) and to improve decision-making skills (Mean = 3.01), which supports their advocacy for rights. Additionally, these programs contribute to better health outcomes (Mean = 3.01) and encourage involvement in community development (Mean = 2.85). However, the impact on promoting gender equality is viewed less positively (Mean = 2.77), indicating that while progress is made; there remains significant room for enhancing the effectiveness of adult education in fostering gender equality and broader empowerment outcomes.

Discussion of Findings

The moderate ratings for social inclusion and women empowerment programs in rural communities in Kwara State, suggest that while existing programs like the Women Empowerment and Livelihood Programme and the Kwara State Women Empowerment Scheme are making a notable impact, their effectiveness is limited. Research by Afolabi (2019) emphasizes the importance of enhancing program reach and impact to achieve significant social outcomes. The moderate ratings indicate that these programs, despite their presence and some effectiveness, require improvements in areas such as outreach, resources, and strategic implementation to better address the needs of the target population.

Adult education programs in rural communities in Kwara State positively impact women's financial autonomy, decision-making skills, and health outcomes, which aligns with previous findings by Smith (2020). However, the limited focus on community engagement and gender equality suggests areas for improvement. Enhancing community involvement and promoting gender equality within these programs could further amplify their positive effects on women's social inclusion and empowerment, as indicated by similar studies (Ibrahim, 2020).

The identified challenges, including limited access to education, socio-cultural barriers, financial constraints, lack of support systems, and gender-based violence, highlight significant barriers to effective adult education in rural communities in Kwara State. These challenges are consistent with the findings of Adeola (2022), who identified similar issues affecting adult education programs in rural areas. Addressing these barriers is crucial for improving the effectiveness of adult education programs and achieving better outcomes in social inclusion and women empowerment.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that social inclusion and women empowerment programs in rural communities in Kwara State are moderately effective, with room for improvement in their impact and reach. The challenges faced in adult education, including socio-cultural and financial barriers, require targeted solutions to enhance program effectiveness. Addressing these challenges through proposed solutions like advocacy, financial support, and mentorship can improve the overall impact of these programs on women's empowerment and social inclusion.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it was recommended that government, school administrators, adult facilitators, adult learners and other stakeholders should:

1. Improve the reach and effectiveness of existing social inclusion and women empowerment programs by increasing resources and refining strategies based on regular evaluations.
2. Implement targeted interventions to overcome challenges such as limited access, socio-cultural barriers, and financial constraints.
3. Increase focus on community involvement and gender equality within adult education programs to amplify their impact.
4. Additional scholarships, financial support, and mentorship opportunities to enhance program participation and effectiveness should be provided.
5. Support advocacy for gender-sensitive policies and affirmative action measures to address systemic issues affecting women's empowerment.

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