



Community Engagement and Adult Education Programmes for Strategic Pathways of Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society in Rivers State

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Abstract

The study examined Community Engagement and Adult Education Programmes for Strategic Pathways of Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society in Rivers State, the study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised of 2, 543 registered members of youth associations and women organizations in ten (10) randomly selected communities in Eleme and Tia Local Government Areas of Rivers State, the instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled: "Community Engagement through Adult Education Programmes for Strategic Pathways of Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society Questionnaire" (CETAEPSPBSISQ). Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in this study. The questionnaire comprises of two (2) sections, A and B. Section A generated demographic information of the respondents while section B had items addressing the research questions and eliciting Very High Extent (VHE) = 4points, High Extent (HE) = 3points, Low Extent (LE) = 2points, and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1point responses. Decision rule for the research questions was based on a criterion mean of 2.50. Any mean response of 2.50 and above was regarded as high extent and was accepted while mean response rating less than 2.50 is regarded as low extent and was rejected. Additionally, the calculated z-value is less than the critical z-value (1.96), the hypothesis was accepted. Contrarily, when the calculated z-value is more than the critical z-value (1.96), the hypothesis was rejected. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others Government and stakeholders should actively involve communities in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of adult education programmes to ensure they address local needs and promote an inclusive society.

Keywords: Adult Education, Building Skilled, Community Engagement, Inclusive Society, Programmes, Strategic Pathways.

Introduction

Adult education has increasingly become a pivotal instrument for promoting community empowerment, socio-economic development, and democratic participation in contemporary societies. As communities face rapid technological changes, economic uncertainties, and complex social challenges, lifelong learning frameworks help individuals acquire the competencies needed to participate meaningfully in communal and national development (UNESCO, 2021; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Adult education is widely recognized as an

engine for transforming disadvantaged populations and promoting active citizenship, particularly in developing contexts where literacy gaps and socio-economic inequalities persist (Rogers, 2019). Nigeria's National Policy on Education emphasizes adult learning as critical for sustainable development, poverty reduction, and inclusive participation in national life (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Despite these national commitments, socio-economic constraints, uneven access to educational opportunities, and cultural barriers continue to inhibit adult learning, particularly among rural inhabitants and marginalized groups especially in Rivers State (Omolewa, 2020; Yusuf & Oyewole, 2021).

Rivers State is characterized by a blend of urban and rural settlements, multi-ethnic populations, and significant inequalities in access to education and socio-economic opportunities. These disparities often hinder residents particularly adults from participating fully in community development processes (Okoro & Nwogu, 2022; Wali & Etebu, 2021). Adult education programmes such as literacy classes, vocational and entrepreneurial training, skills acquisition, and civic education therefore play a strategic role in bridging these gaps, strengthening community cohesion, and equipping individuals for productive engagement (Akinwale, 2020). Such programmes have been shown to empower adults with essential competencies that promote both economic self-reliance and social responsibility in communities.

Community engagement is crucial for fostering collective problem-solving, promoting inclusive governance, and enhancing local development outcomes. Adult education enhances the capacity of citizens to contribute to issues such as environmental sanitation, peacebuilding, community health, and local economic initiatives. According to Aderinoye and Olaniran (2020), adults who engage in lifelong learning demonstrate stronger civic participation, better employability, and improved social responsibility. Similarly, Brookfield (2018) emphasizes that adult learning cultivates critical consciousness, enabling individuals to identify community in Rivers State challenges and collaborate in resolving them.

In the context of Rivers State, strengthening community engagement through adult education is essential for addressing challenges such as youth restiveness, unemployment, environmental degradation, and limited civic awareness. Strategic pathways such as collaborative partnerships, community-driven learning centers, digital learning programmes, and skills-oriented adult education interventions can significantly enhance inclusion and social development (Ezeanya & Worlu, 2023; Nnamdi & Ogbonda, 2022). These strategies align with global calls for innovative and community-centered approaches to lifelong learning that promote resilience and sustainable development (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognized importance of adult education, many communities in Rivers State still experience low levels of participation in adult learning programmes and limited community engagement. High illiteracy rates among adults, inadequate access to functional literacy centers, and insufficient government investment hinder the effectiveness of adult education initiatives. Additionally, socio-economic issues such as unemployment, poverty, and insecurity further discourage adult learners from participating actively in community development programmes

Many adults lack the skills needed for meaningful socio-economic contribution, leading to dependency, youth restiveness, and weakened community governance structures. There is also a gap between existing adult education programmes and the actual developmental needs of communities. Collaboration between stakeholders' government agencies, NGOs, private organizations, and local communities remains weak, making it difficult to implement sustainable adult learning initiatives.

Consequently, adult education is yet to fully achieve its potential as a tool for community engagement and inclusive development in Rivers State. This calls for a strategic reassessment of how adult education can be leveraged to build a skilled, empowered, and cohesive

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to examine community engagement and adult education programmes for strategic pathways of building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the role of community engagement in adult education programmes through strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State
2. To assess how adult education programmes contributes to skill development and inclusivity through adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State
3. To propose strategic pathways for improving adult education programmes for inclusive societal development: through adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the roles of community engagement in adult education programmes through adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State?

2. How does adult education programmes contribute to skill development and inclusivity in building a skilled and inclusive society through: adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State?
3. What strategic pathways can be proposed for improving adult education programmes towards inclusive societal development through: adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State?

Hypotheses of the Study

he following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H0₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of youth and women on the role of community engagement in adult education programmes through strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State

H0₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of youth and women on the adult education programmes contributes to skill development and inclusivity through adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State

H0₃: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of youth and women on the proposed strategic pathways for improving adult education programmes for inclusive societal development: through adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised of 2, 543 registered members of youth associations and women organizations in ten (10) randomly selected communities in Eleme and Tia Local Government Areas of Rivers State (Eleme: Akpajo, Aleto, Alesa, Ogale and Ebubu), and (Tia: Bara-Ale, Bara-Alue, Barayira, Nonwa Uedume and Nonwa Tai). 20% proportionate sampling technique was applied to realize a sample size of 509. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled: “Community Engagement through Adult Education Programmes for Strategic Pathways of Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society Questionnaire” (CETAEPSPBSISQ). Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in this study. The questionnaire comprises of two (2) sections, A and B. Section A generated demographic information of the respondents while section B had items addressing the research questions and eliciting Very High Extent (VHE) = 4points, High Extent (HE) = 3points, Low Extent (LE) = 2points, and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1point responses. Decision rule for the research questions was based on a criterion mean of 2.50. Any mean

response of 2.50 and above was regarded as high extent and was accepted while mean response rating less than 2.50 is regarded as low extent and was rejected. Additionally, the calculated z-value is less than the critical z-value (1.96), the hypothesis was accepted. Contrarily, when the calculated z-value is more than the critical z-value (1.96), the hypothesis was rejected.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the roles of community engagement in adult education programmes through adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Opinion Scores of Youth Association and Women Organization on the Roles of Community Engagement in Adult Education Programmes Through Adult Education: Strategic Pathways for Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society in Rivers State.

S/No	Items	Youth Association (N =308)		Women Organization (N=166)		Total		Remarks
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		SD	
1	Adult education programmes in Rivers State help adults acquire skills that enhance community participation.	2.98	0.84	2.67	1.00	2.83	0.92	Accepted
2	Adult education initiatives contribute significantly to improving civic awareness among community members.	3.04	0.96	2.77	0.94	2.91	0.95	Accepted
3	Adult learning encourages collaboration and collective problem-	2.94	0.88	2.75	0.86	2.85	0.87	Accepted

	solving within communities.							
4	Adult education enhances individuals' ability to participate in local development projects.	2.10	0.96	2.06	0.84	2.08	0.90	Rejected
5	Adult education programmes promote social inclusion and strengthen community cohesion.	2.88	0.94	2.93	0.86	2.91	0.90	Accepted
	Grand Mean	2.79	0.92	2.64	0.90	2.72	0.91	Accepted

The data in table 1 revealed the mean and standard deviation of youth association and women organization of Eleme and Tia Local Government Area of Rivers State. Based on the mean and standard deviation of youth association and women organization on the roles of community engagement in adult education programmes through adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State items, 1,2,3,4 and 5 with mean scores ranging between (2.08-3.04). However, the same table revealed the response of youth association as they expressed high extent on item 1,2,3 and 5, with mean and standard deviation between (2.98-0.84), (3.04-0.96), (2.94-0.88), and (2.88-0.94) which fell under high extent. While women organization on the other hand with mean and standard deviation between (2.67-1.00), (2.77-0.94), (2.75-0.86), and (2.93-0.86) equally fell on high extent. Item 4 fell on low extent with the mean and standard deviation of (2.10-0.96) and (2.06-0.84) respectively. Therefore, with a mean score of 2.79 for youth association and 2.64 women organization, it was evident that the respondents agreed that the roles of community engagement in adult education programmes through adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State is to a high extent.

Research Question 2: How does adult education programmes contribute to skill development and inclusivity in building a skilled and inclusive society through: adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Opinion Scores of Youth Association and Women Organization on how Adult Education Programmes Contribute to Skill Development and Inclusivity in Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society Through: Adult Education: Strategic Pathways for Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society in Rivers State.

S/No	Items	Youth Association (N =308)		Women Organization (N=166)		Total		Remarks
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		SD	
1	Financial constraints prevent many adults from participating in adult education programmes.	2.69	0.94	2.73	1.01	2.71	0.98	Accepted
2	Lack of awareness about available adult education programmes limits adult participation.	2.83	0.88	2.79	0.92	2.81	0.90	Accepted
3	Inadequate learning facilities and infrastructures discourage adults from enrolling in adult education initiatives.	3.01	0.84	2.97	0.96	2.99	0.90	Accepted
4	Work and family responsibilities make it difficult for adults to attend adult education programmes regularly.	2.88	0.94	2.83	1.00	2.86	0.97	Accepted
5	Cultural beliefs and social norms discourage adults from	2.10	1.02	1.96	0.86	2.13	0.94	Rejected

engaging in community- based learning activities.								
Grand Mean& SD	2.70	0.92	2.66	0.95	2.68	0.94	Accepted	

The data in table 2 revealed the mean and standard deviation of youth association and women organization of Eleme and Tia Local Government Area of Rivers State. Based on the mean and standard deviation of youth association and women association on how adult education programmes contribute to skill development and inclusivity in building a skilled and inclusive society through: adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State items, 1,2,3,4 and 5 with mean scores ranging between (2.10-3.01). However, the same table revealed the response of youth association as they expressed high extent on item 1,2,3 and 4, with mean and standard deviation between (2.69-0.94), (2.83-0.88), (3.01-0.84), and (2.88-0.94) which fell under high extent. While women organization on the other hand with mean and standard deviation between (2.73-1.01), (2.79-0.92), (2.97-0.96), and (2.83-1.00) equally fell on high extent. Item 5 fell on low extent with the mean and standard deviation of (2.10-1.01) and (1.96-0.86) respectively. Therefore, with a mean score of 2.70 for youth association and 2.66 women organization, it was evident that the respondents agreed that adult education programmes contribute to skill development and inclusivity in building a skilled and inclusive society through: adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State to a high extent.

Research Question 3: What strategic pathways can be proposed for improving adult education programmes towards inclusive societal development through: adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean Opinion Scores of Youth Association and Women Organization on the Strategic Pathways that can be Proposed for Improving Adult Education Programmes towards Inclusive Societal Development Through: Adult Education: Strategic Pathways for Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society in Rivers State.

S/No	Items	Youth Association (N =308)		Women Organization (N=166)		Total		Remarks
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	SD		
1	Skills acquisition and vocational training programmes	2.87	0.94	2.79	0.90	2.83	0.92	Accepted

	are effectively used to promote adult empowerment.							
2	Digital learning and technology-based approaches are increasingly used to expand access to adult education.	2.07	0.96	2.11	0.88	2.09	0.92	Rejected
3	Government and NGOs provide adequate support and partnerships that enhance adult education strategies.	3.18	0.98	2.98	0.82	3.08	0.90	Accepted
4	Community-based learning centres help strengthen adult involvement in community development activities.	2.90	0.88	2.88	0.92	2.89	0.90	Accepted
5	Adult education programmes promote social inclusion Through digital learning.	3.01	1.02	3.17	0.94	3.14	0.98	Accepted
	Grand Mean& SD	2.81	0.96	2.79	0.89	2.80	0.93	Accepted

The data in table 3 revealed the mean and standard deviation of youth association and women organization of Eleme and Tia Local Government Area of Rivers State. Based on the mean and standard deviation of youth association and women organization on the strategic pathways can be proposed for improving adult education programmes towards inclusive societal development through: adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State items, 1,2,3,4 and 5 with mean scores ranging between (2.07-3.18). However, the

same table revealed the response of youth association as they expressed high extent on item 1,3,4 and 5, with mean and standard deviation between (2.87-0.94), (3.18-0.98), (2.90-0.88), and (3.01-1.02) which fell under high extent. While women organization on the other hand with mean and standard deviation between (2.79-0.90), (2.98-0.82), (2.88-0.92), and (3.17-0.94) equally fell on high extent. Item 2 fell on low extent with the mean and standard deviation of (2.07-0.96) and (2.11-0.88) respectively. Therefore, with a mean score of 2.81 for youth association and 2.79 women organization, it was evident that the respondents agreed that there are strategic pathways proposed for improving adult education programmes towards inclusive societal development through: adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State to a high extent.

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of youth and women on the role of community engagement in adult education programmes through strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State

Table 4: Z-test Analysis of the Significant Difference between Youth Association and Women Organization on the Role of Community Engagement in Adult Education Programmes Through Strategic Pathways for Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society in Rivers State.

Respondents	N	X	SD	df	z -Cal	z -Crit	Ls	Decision
Youth Association	308	2.79	0.92	472	1.6564	1.96	0.05	Accepted
Women Organization	166	2.64	0.90					

Table 4 shows that youth association had a mean and standard deviation score of 2.79 and 0.92 respectively, while women organization had mean and standard deviation scores of 2.64 and 0.90 respectively. The z-cal value was 1.6564, while z-crit was 1.96 with a degree of freedom of 472 at 0.05 level of significance. This result shows that z-cal was less than z-crit which implies that the null hypothesis was Accepted. Thus, there is no significant difference between the mean response of youth association and women organization on the role of community engagement in adult education programmes through strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State.

Hypotheses 2: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of youth and women on the adult education programmes contributes to skill development and inclusivity through adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State

Table 5: Z-test Analysis of the Significant Difference between Youth Association and Women Organization on the Adult Education Programmes Contributes to Skill Development and Inclusivity Through Adult Education: Strategic Pathways for Building a Skills and Inclusive Society in Rivers State.

Respondents	N	X	SD	df	z -Cal	z -Crit	Ls	Decision
Youth Association	308	2.70	0.92	472	1.7489	1.96	0.05	Accepted
Women Organization	166	2.66	0.95					

Table 5 shows that youth association had a mean and standard deviation score of 2.70 and 0.92 respectively, while women organization had mean and standard deviation scores of 2.66 and 0.95 respectively. The z-cal value was 1.7489, while z-crit was 1.96 with a degree of freedom of 472 at 0.05 level of significance. This result shows that z-cal was less than z-crit which implies that the null hypothesis was Accepted. Thus, there is no significant difference between the mean response of youth association and women association on the adult education programmes contributes to skill development and inclusivity through adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State.

Hypotheses 3: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of youth and women on the proposed strategic pathways for improving adult education programmes for inclusive societal development: through adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State

Table 6: Z-test Analysis of the Significant Difference between Youth Association and Women Organization on the Proposed Strategic Pathways for Improving Adult Education Programmes for Inclusive Societal Development: Through Adult Education Strategic Pathways for Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society in Rivers State.

Respondents	N	X	SD	df	z -Cal	z -Crit	Ls	Decision
Youth Association	308	2.81	0.96	509	1.7137	1.96	0.05	Accepted
Women Organization	166	2.79	0.89					

Table 6 shows that youth association had a mean and standard deviation score of 2.81 and 0.96 respectively, while women organization had mean and standard deviation scores of 2.79 and 0.89 respectively. The z-cal value was 1.7137, while z-crit was 1.96 with a degree of freedom of 472 at 0.05 level of significance. This result shows that z-cal was less than z-crit which implies that the null hypothesis was Accepted. Thus, there is no significant difference between the mean response of youth association and women organization on the proposed strategic pathways for improving adult education programmes for inclusive societal development:

through adult education: strategic pathways for building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine community engagement and adult education programmes for strategic pathways of building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State. The findings are discussed in line with the research questions, hypotheses tested, and existing literature.

Discussion of Findings

Role of Community Engagement in Adult Education Programmes Through Strategic Pathways for Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society

The result of the study on research question 1 showed that adult education programmes in Rivers State helped adults acquire skills that enhanced community participation. The findings is in line with Akinwale (2020) who asserted that adult education programmes such as literacy classes, vocational and entrepreneurial training, skills acquisition, and civic education played a strategic role in bridging these gaps, strengthening community cohesion, and equipping individuals for productive engagement.

Adult Education Programmes Contributions to Skill Development and Inclusivity Through Adult Education: Strategic Pathways for Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society in Rivers State

The result of the study on research question 2 revealed that adult education programmes contribute to skill development and inclusivity in building a skilled and inclusive society in Rivers State. The findings in agreement with Aderinoye and Olaniran (2020) opined that adult education enhances the capacity of citizens to contribute to issues such as environmental sanitation, peacebuilding, community health, and local economic initiatives. Also, adults who engage in lifelong learning demonstrate stronger civic participation, better employability, and improved social responsibility.

Strategic Pathways for Improving Adult Education Programmes for Inclusive Societal Development: Through Adult Education: Strategic Pathways for Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society in Rivers State

The results of research question 3 indicated that through strategic pathways proposed for the improvement of adult education programmes towards inclusive societal development in Rivers State, government and NGOs can provide adequate support and partnerships that enhance adult

education strategies. The findings align with Ezeanya & Worlu (2023) and Nnamdi & Ogbonda (2022) who reviewed that strategic pathways such as collaborative partnerships, community-driven learning centers, digital learning programmes, and skills-oriented adult education interventions can significantly enhance inclusion and social development. Moreso, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2022) confirms that these strategies align with global calls for innovative and community-centered approaches to lifelong learning that promote resilience and sustainable development.

Conclusion

Based on the findings from the study, the researchers therefore conclude that adult education programmes in Rivers State help adults acquire skills that enhance community participation, encourages collaboration and collective problem-solving within communities. Financial constraints prevent many adults from participating in adult education programmes, cultural beliefs and social norms also discourages adults from engaging in community-based learning activities. Also, skill acquisition and vocational training programmes are effectively used to promote adult empowerment, digital learning and technology-based approaches increasingly expand access to adult education in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions generated from the study, the following recommendations were made by the researchers:

1. Government and stakeholders should actively involve communities in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of adult education programmes to ensure they address local needs and promote an inclusive society.
2. Adult education programmes should focus on market-relevant skills while ensuring equal access for women, youths, persons with disabilities, and other disadvantaged groups.
3. Government and stakeholders should increase funding, strengthen partnerships, integrate technology, and regularly evaluate programmes to enhance their effectiveness and support inclusive societal development.

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