



RETHINKING SKILL ACQUISITION AMONG WOMEN FOR SUSTAINABLE GLOBAL BALANCE IN NIGERIA: A PARADIGM SHIFT TOWARDS LITERACY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Literacy education is widely recognized as a fundamental foundation for meaningful and sustainable development, providing individuals with the specialized knowledge and skills required for economic, social, and environmental advancement. To address persistent gender disparities in skill acquisition often favouring men it is essential that literacy programmes be intentionally designed to empower women with competencies that promote sustainable global balance. This paper examines literacy education programmes and their role in fostering sustainable global balance, with particular attention to women's literacy for environmental, social, and economic sustainability. It further explores how women's skill acquisition through literacy education contributes to broader development outcomes. The paper concludes that literacy-driven skill acquisition enhances women's holistic empowerment across economic, social, and environmental dimensions, thereby supporting sustainable global balance. It recommends, among other measures, that women be encouraged to acquire diverse and market-relevant skills through literacy education in order to strengthen problem-solving abilities, promote mutual respect, and improve employability.

Keywords: Women, Literacy Education, Skill Acquisition and Sustainable Global Balance.

Introduction

Education as a basic human right has long been affirmed at the international level. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 established the principle that every individual is entitled to free and compulsory elementary education, setting a global moral and legal foundation for educational access. Since then, several international frameworks such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4) have strengthened the commitment to universal education. These instruments collectively emphasize that equal access to quality education is essential for personal freedom, social mobility, global citizenship, and sustainable development. Globally, education is viewed not only as a right but also as a powerful tool for reducing poverty, promoting peace, advancing gender equality, and fostering economic growth. Countries around the world continue to invest in educational reforms and inclusive policies to ensure that marginalized populations, including women, children, minorities, and people with disabilities, are not excluded from this fundamental right (Olojede and Eziafa, 2021).

In the African context, the recognition of education as a basic human right aligns strongly with continental commitments and development priorities. Many African nations embed the right to education in their constitutions, drawing inspiration from global human rights frameworks. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) explicitly affirm every child's right to free and compulsory basic education. Regionally, initiatives such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16–25) stress the need for inclusive, equitable, and quality education as a driver of economic transformation and social stability.

As a member nation, Nigeria supports this declaration. It is noteworthy too that literacy is also the right of every human being in Nigeria. The Hamburg Declaration states under Resolution 11 that Literacy, broadly conceived as basic knowledge and skills needed by all in a rapid changing world, is a fundamental human right. The rationale for recognizing literacy as a right is the set of benefits it offers to individuals, families, communities and nations. The intrinsic human value of education- its ability to add meaning and value to everyone's life without discrimination (UNESCO, 2005). Ajayi (2023) quoting Ewhe & Kulu (2020) stated that education does not

merely enable individuals to attain their intellectual capacity to the fullest, it also helps them develop emotionally, morally, socially, culturally and physically. This implies that education is not limited to formal schooling but a lifelong process (including literacy education).

Literacy education is crucial for skill acquisition in Nigeria. According to Obi, Atu Abanye and Nnenna, (2021), it is the type of education programmes designed to prepare adults for acquiring skills for self-reliance work, individual development towards social, economic and professional competence. it enables individuals to access information, learn new skills, improve their livelihood. It allows for better understanding of instruction, and other resources needed for adult vocational training and job performance. This in turn leads to increase employability and economic independence (Akande & Aina, 2024). There is no doubt the fact that the societies are becoming aware of the fact that educating women is a strong weapon for social, economic and environmental development. This is to buttress the African philosophy expressed in an axiom which says that when you educate a man, you educate an individual, but when you educate a woman, you educate a nation. Skill acquisition through literacy programmes plays a crucial role in empowering women by providing them with relevant and marketable skills. It enhances their employability, income earning potential, and economic independence for global balance.

When discussing sustainable global balance, women should not be ignored, this is because, for a nation to develop, it is important to invest in the education of women. However, the National Bureau of statistics (2020) stated that women formed 50.8% of the entire population in Nigeria. It is noteworthy to state that majority of these women are illiterates, poverty ridden, and disadvantaged socially, economically and culturally. Illiteracy and limited acquisition of skills restrict women's economic opportunities, making them more vulnerable to exploitation, low paying jobs, and economic independence. It could also hamper their ability to provide for their family (Mmuozoba, 2023 Nwizu & Avoseh, 2023). This implies that, there are large disparities between the education that men and women receive in the country.

To buttress the above, the Central Bank of Nigeria (2000), stated that the gender gap in literacy rates at the rural level between boys and girls was 18.3 in favour of the boys overall. This indicates that there is a gender dimension to educational attainment in Nigeria. In line with this, Veriv Africa (2024), revealed that there is a significant gender disparity in the literacy rate in Nigeria. The male literacy is 79.89% and the female literacy rate is 65.3% for youth aged 15- 24

years. Corroborating the above, UNICEF, (2014), stated that in Nigeria, the statistics in ensuring women education is rated as the poorest in the world. This implies that many females do not have access to acquisition of skills through literacy education that fostering employment opportunities that supposed to equip them with essential competencies for self-sufficiency and economic stability due to certain cultural practices and there is no doubt the fact that the majority of Nigerian illiterates are women who generally are responsible for nurturing and raising children. This means that the children of these women are unlikely to benefit from motherly support for their children in the area of formal education.

Nwakwe, Faleye, Emunemu, & Adelore (2008) and Obi, Atu, & Nnenna, (2024), linked the imbalance in genders' skill acquisition in favour of men to the long-held belief in male superiority and female subordination coupled with the patriarchal practices which gave women no traditional rights to succession. To Nmadi (2000) the Nigerian society, like other developing countries globally, has been dotted with peculiar cultural practices that are potentially hurtful to women's acquiring skills through literacy education such as: early/forced marriage, wife inheritance, widowhood practices and so on. In essence, women seem not to have won the battle against chauvinism and patriarchy that was predominantly the practice in the stone-age world and Africa in particular. Inequality in acquisition of skills through literacy education can often start with discriminatory attitude, practices, and unequal power relations between women and men within the family. The unequal division of labour and responsibilities within households also limits women's potential to find the time to attend literacy education programmes. Even in the twenty-first century, so many social and cultural taboos inhibit the process of women especially in the third world countries like some parts of Latin America, Asia, the Caribbean and Africa (Cornwell, 2005).

Oni (2006) stated that those gender stereotypes are evidence in modern society, just as they were in the traditional society. To her, men is still the pacesetter of things in the house, they are the captains of industries, just to mention but a few. Akande, Babalola & Aboderin, (2008), however, believes that an informed, fulfilled and educated woman is critical for the children of the 21st century. It is a way of providing tools for economic independence, enhancing self-esteem and assisting women in creating a better tomorrow for their families, with the aim of empowering women in the area of social, economic and environment for global balance. This

implies that many females do not have access to acquisition of skills through literacy education that fostering employment opportunities that supposed to equip them with essential competencies for self-sufficiency and economic stability due to certain cultural practices. There is therefore the need to improve women's standards in the area of skills acquisition through literacy education because it can equip women with necessary skills for combating immediate and future environmental, social and economic problems such as underdevelopment for global balance.

Literacy Education Programmes

Defining literacy in our changing world is not easy. Years ago, being literate meant being able to read, write and do simple calculation. Now, being literate means being able to read and write at a level to be successful in today's world and also being proficient in skills that would enable him or her knowing how to solve problems and take decisions (National Mass Education Commission)/UNICEF, 2010). This reveals that the power of literacy lies not only in the ability to read and write, but rather in an individual's ability to put those skills to work in shaping the course of his or her own life. With the insight that, genuine literacy education involves the 'reading the word and the world'. Effective participation of women and men in literacy programmes is needed to enable them survive and meet the challenges of the future (UNESCO/UNICEF, 2005). This is very important because it enables an individual to live meaningfully. Literacy programmes are necessary not only for preserving useful old values and knowledge, but more importantly for facilitating the creation of new social values and knowledge. It is necessary for the fostering of harmonious and peaceful living and the maintenance of a healthy environment, as well as in matter of gender. It could also bring about positive change in attitudes, and particularly so for adult member of the family.

Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potentials and to participate fully in their family and wider society (Peters, 2007). Women participation in literacy education can be viewed from the perspective of the benefits to be gained from the said programmes. Implicit in this penchant for getting involved is the notion of the relationship between self and society. There are three rationals for women participation in literacy programme: First, merely knowing that women participation in literacy education promotes dignity and self-sufficiency within her. Secondly, it enables women to exhibit their energies and resources within the society. Finally, women participation in literacy

education provides source of special insight, information, knowledge and experience, which contribute to the soundness of community solutions.

The point emphasized above is that, literacy programmes is necessary for both genders due to the rapid changes taking place in contemporary society, such as changes in job skills, interpersonal relations, social standards and norms, science and technology and other domains. In addition, both genders need to learn in a more purposeful, systematic way throughout their lives. In essence, literacy education should be encouraged, fostered and improved as it focuses on the management of emerging life challenges for all people. It is therefore important that literacy programmes are designed to equip women learners with core competencies such as critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills and writing skills, among others to enable them contribute their own quota to their family in particular and the society in general (Akande, et al, 2024).

Sustainable Global Balance

Balance is the ability to remain steady when you are standing up, while global can be describe as something that happens in all parts of the world or affects all parts of the world. Global balance can therefore be defined in different ways, depending on the context. It may be global balance of a budget, balance a career, balance perfectly, balance the scale, careful balance, cash balance and so on. (Collins dictionary, 2025). In this context however, global balance refers to global gender balance in the area of access to skills acquisition through literacy education in Nigeria.

The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015) provide a framework for achieving a sustainable global balance, with the aim to achieve 'peace and prosperity for people and the planet' by 2030. it encompassing various environmental, social and economic sustainability. The Sustainable Development Goals are for a call for action by all countries (Nigeria inclusive). These goals aim to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that everyone has the chance to live a healthy and fulfilling life. Goal number 5, of SDGs centered on gender equality, which focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. It aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. Gender equality is relevant for discussion now because of the following: 1). It is fundamental human right. 2). Empowering women and girls. 3). It can boost economic growth. 4). Reduce poverty, and 5). Improve overall wellbeing.

Women Literacy Education for Environmental Sustainability

There is no doubt the fact that environmental problems have become a global issue in which Nigeria is not excluded. These challenges in the country include but not limited to the following: high proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, water pollution, air pollution, deforestation, overpopulation, poor hygiene and so on. This clearly depicts that environmental issue is not local but international concern. Environmental protection to Nwoye (2023), therefore, refers to deliberate and intention actions to safeguard and preserve the environment with the purpose of ensuring that activities which humans engage in for the survival does not compromise the ability of future generations to benefit from the environment.

Literacy Education among women for environmental Sustainability for Global Balance

It is therefore important to leverage on the ease provided by literacy education for women to promote sustainable environmental protection. The roles of literacy education for women cannot be overemphasized in environmental sustainability for Global Balance in Nigeria. Some of the roles according to Erinsakin & Awogoke (2016) and Okemakinde (2020) are as follows:

1. Developing and formation of right attitudes by women towards environmental protection: in most cases, women do interact ignorantly with the environment, where they live. For example, a person, who after smoking, drops the cigarette without quenching its light may not know the extent to which his/her action can go on the environment. Skill acquired through literacy education will enable her to develop, form, and cultivate right attitudes towards environment.
2. Awareness on the importance of conserving and protecting the environment: lack of awareness is a bane to environmental degradation and pollution. Women will be aware through literacy education, the importance of conserving and protecting her environment.
3. Giving knowledge on environmental degradation and its effects on economy: people and nations are very poor, because of poor economy occasioned by environmental degradation. Women would be able to know the effects of environmental degradation on the economy and by extension, break the circle of poverty with the exposure to literacy education.

In essence, literacy education provides women with opportunities to acquire the skills, knowledge, values, attitudes and commitment that are needed to protect and improve the environment. Reducing illiteracy rate among them could be highly effective in reducing the incidence of trafficking girls to borders or other countries; increase overall environmental awareness; and reducing the likelihood of terrorism.

Social Sustainability

The principle of social sustainability include: social equity and justice, diversity and inclusion, democratic participation and empowerment, livelihood security, and social wellbeing and quality of life. Social empowerment to Mmuozoba (2023), focusses on challenging social norms and gender roles, promoting gender equality, and ensuring women's participation and representation in decision-making. To her, it should address issues such as gender-based violence, discrimination, and harmful cultural practices. The social environment in Nigeria, according to Manthoto, Braimoh and Adeola (2000) is defined by certain variables that describe social categories, such as gender. This interferes with the equity and equality that is hoped for in learning situations. To him, the structure and educational models established are not based on the realities of Nigeria.

Literacy Education among women for Social Sustainability for Global Balance

Women with literacy education are therefore more likely to seek medical care, ensure their children are immunized, be better informed about their children's nutritional requirements and adopt improved sanitation practices. As a result, their infants and children have higher survival rates and tend to be healthier and better nourished. There is also, a greater likelihood of using child health-care technique; enhanced readiness to send children to school; cleaner homes and better child nutrition; and greater disposition to space families. Literate woman leads directly to better productive health in their future life, improve family health, as well as lower rates of child mortality and malnutrition (Okeke, 2021).

It involves transforming social institutions to enhance society's capacity to achieve its goals. It includes qualitative changes in how society organizes itself and conducts activities such as adopting more progressive attitudes, behaviours, and advance technologies (Obi, Atu Abanye and Nnenna, 2021). The learning processes are not dynamically adapted to these Nigerian realities through the normal process of socialization because education is seen as the creator of

hierarchies and a privileged class. This comes to play when critical decisions such as those concerning who should receive education in the family are being made in favour of men. The traditional ideology that surrounded the home and the family in Africa categorizes women as housemakers in relation to domesticity and motherhood. They are mainly tied to the private world of the home, hidden and invisible. In patriarchal social relations, men appear on the domestic scene only rarely, and even then, they are still the superiors. (Habasonda, 2002) This is partly what has led to decrease enrolment among females in skills acquisition programmes through literacy programmes in the country.

Economic sustainability

According to World Bank (2002), economic empowerment involves increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable the institutions that affects their lives. It focuses on increasing the economic wealth of individuals participated in the programme.

Literacy Education among women for Economic Sustainability for Global Balance

Among the economic effects of literacy on women were greater capacity to mobilize credit, greater willingness to use banks, and readiness to participate in and establish economic organizations. Economic empowerment of women refers to the ability of women to have access and control over economic resources, financial independence, employment opportunities and power to make economic decisions. Corroborating the above, Mmuozoba (2023), stated that economic empowerment for women involves efforts to reduce gender-based economic inequalities and create an environment where women can fully participate in and benefit from economic activities.

Educating women would be an important step in overcoming poverty. The idea of poverty reduction makes the right to literacy education to be a powerful tool in bringing about change in the lives of women. According to Nwizu & Avoseh, (2023), Poverty reduction is necessary in the sense that poverty itself has been universally affirmed as a key obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights, and it has a visible gender profile. Skill acquisition and empowerment programmes for women provides equal access to education. If education of women is ensured, the multiplier effect would be guarantee and it would lead to an improved national human capital



based with diverse skills that will engender national development that would bring about Global balance.

Acquisition of skills through Literacy Education by women and Sustainable Global Balance

Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling women to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potentials and to participate fully in their family and wider society. Women participation in literacy education can be viewed from the perspective of the benefits to be gained from the said programmes. Implicit in this penchant for getting involved is the notion of the relationship between self and society. There are three rational for women participation in literacy programme: First, merely knowing that women participation in literacy education promotes dignity and self-sufficiency within her. Secondly, it enables women to exhibit their energies and resources within the society. In addition, women participation in literacy education provides source of special insight, information, knowledge and experience, which contribute to the soundness of community solutions as follows:

1. Literacy education expands the consciousness and horizon of women: it increases her power of thinking, enables her to improve her environment and society. Literacy can therefore serve as the appropriate tool as it can play the dual role of serving as agent of mass mobilization for self-development as well as public enlightenment.
2. Literacy helps the women to understand population education, social obligation and so on: literate women will appreciate the efforts of government in the control of overpopulation like family planning, eating balance diet, and so on.
3. Literacy helps to articulate the needs of women: it made women to be aware oof their rights, to articulate their needs by playing significant roles in their society and the nation at large.
4. Literacy education enlightens the women: when women were literalized, they become enlightened or informed and will synthesize them into supporting government development programmes.
5. Literacy education brings to women, a greater sense of personal dignity, additional skills in problem solving, and respect for others.

6. Fostering national development through literacy education: for a nation to develop, women must be liberated from negative traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices. It is also necessary for women to be literate to take their own destiny in their hands.

In essence, literacy education effects on women includes, release from fear of humiliation and powerlessness, readiness to influence family decisions, increased cooperation in socio-cultural organization, and new capacity for leadership. In essence she can voice her opinion, stand up for herself monetary as well as emotionally in the society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite the numerous advantages that can be derived from participating in skill acquisition through literacy education, which includes but not limited to: enhances survival strategies that enable women to survive the harsh conditions in which they live; empowerment of women to participate actively in society; reducing gender-based discrimination and violence, and creating supportive environment that encourage women participation in learning; enable women to realize their creative potential and what they can do individually and collectively transform themselves, their respective communities and the nation at large. Yet, there exist low level of women's participation in these laudable programmes which can be traced to chauvinism and patriarchal nature of our society. It is therefore important that literacy programmes are designed to equip women learners with skills acquisition that will bring about sustainable global balance. This paper therefore, established the fact that skill acquisition through literacy education contribute to holistic empowerment, encompassing economic, social and environmental for sustainable global balance for women. This is even necessary now where both women and men in the society are expected to contribute to the development of their families and the society at large.

The following are the recommendations advanced for further consideration towards the improvement of women participation in skills acquisition through literacy education for global balance in Nigeria:

1. Researchers and practitioners in the area of literacy education should continue to monitor policies, practices and all cultural gendered practices which have so much influence on women participation in skills acquisition through literacy programmes.

2. Women should be encouraged to acquire and become multi-skilled through literacy education that would translate to problem solving, respect for others and fit into labour markets.
3. In addition, Nigerian men should give adequate information on the importance of literacy education to their wives and also encourage and allow them to participate in the said programmes.
4. Above all, all hands must be on deck in the recognition of the fact that women's full participation in skill acquisition through literacy programmes is a pre-requisite to nation building.

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