

The Influence of Literacy Education on Youth Development in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of literacy education on youth development in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, with a population comprising all youths in the metropolis. A sample of 300 youths was selected using simple random sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.78. Descriptive statistics (percentages) were used to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics (chi-square) were used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a statistically significant influence of literacy education on youth involvement in community development programmes, political participation, and vocational skill acquisition in the Ilorin Metropolis. Based on these findings, it is recommended that the literacy education curriculum be revised to emphasise skills acquisition. Likewise, the government and relevant stakeholders should increase investment in literacy education initiatives to enhance youth development in the region.

Keywords: *literacy education, community development, political participation, vocational skills acquisition*

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Introduction

The development of human capital is an essential drive towards the sustenance of the socio-economic and political development of any nation (Onyenemezu, 2014). This informs the massive investment in literacy education programmes for the equalisation of literacy opportunities for all citizens, irrespective of economic status. Meanwhile, Oghenekohwo (2013) advanced that literacy in capacity is factored by empowerment, engagement, experience and evidence, which represent the variables of education for development. The correlation between literacy education and youth development is the enhancement of active citizenship of

creative, adaptive and dynamic people as they shape and re-order their lives. In this respect, literacy education is a pre-requisite for effective social participation, an instrument of empowerment, engagement, experience and evidence at individual and community levels in response to sustainable development.

Literacy education has been defined as the ability to read, write, use numeracy, handle information, express ideas and opinions, make decisions and solve problems as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners (Chukwuemeka, 2009). At the same time, education, in its general sense, is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training or research. Any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks feels, or acts may be considered educational. Therefore, literacy education is the process of transferring or teaching individual groups of people how to read, write and use numeracy to handle information, express ideas and opinions to make decisions and solve problems and so on, under the strict supervision or guidance of others such as teachers, instructors or anybody who has the authority to educate others. The human benefits from literacy are related to factors such as improving self-esteem, empowerment, creativity and critical reflections that participation in adult literacy programmes and the practice of literacy may produce. The benefits humans derive from literacy education apart from being able to read and write include improved health, increased political participation and awareness, participation in community development programmes, and economic programmes, among others.

Literacy education, as an integral aspect of education, is a learning process, whether formal, informal or non-formal, which the adult person engages in for better information, self and national development of youth (Onyenemezu, 2012). Nzeneri (2010) conceives of an adult as a person who is mature both physically and psychologically as well as responsible economically, politically, socially, culturally and environmentally. An adult is also defined as one who has attained the voting age, which is 18 years in Nigeria and many, if not most, countries. When we look at these three definitions, we find that the emphasis is on maturity and responsibility. Literacy education, as an aspect of adult education, is for national development. It encompasses developing the human mind, knowledge, attitude, skills, behavioural patterns, and physical and necessary ideas capable of solving human and societal problems in order to achieve youth development (Onyenemezu and Aduvo, 2014). Manpower development denotes a process of education and training through which human resources available in a country are enabled to acquire relevant skills for optimal performance and, subsequently, improved productivity (Ihejirika and Onyenemezu 2012).

In the views of Yesufu (2000), the role of adult education in the development of manpower is explained by the complex relationships that exist between all its forms and the economic, political, social and cultural factors of development. Wider et al. (2016) asserted that in the case of the influence of literacy education and political participation, a significantly higher proportion of women who participated in literacy programs performed better in the political activities in their various communities than those who did not participate. However, the link between adult education and literacy education was pointed out by Williams (2003), who asserted that literacy education can be a major tool for reducing poverty, increasing employment opportunities, advancing gender equality, improving family health, protecting the environment and promoting core democratic values. In recent years, many literacy education programmes have been oriented towards local needs, especially through a focus on community development and environmental protection. Adult education is an informal education that is organised for adults who are unable to attend formal education. Thus, literacy education centres are organised for such adults. In the centres, adult learners are trained in various vocational skills, such as reading and writing.

Education impacts every individual in a country and plays a crucial role in national development. Research indicates a strong positive correlation between the expansion of education and economic growth (Ashby Commission, 1960; Chukwuemeka, 2009). Yesufu (2000) notes that without literacy education, other factors of production remain passive, and human capital formation—essential for economic progress—is severely hindered. Similarly, UNESCO (2005) reported that fostering a literate environment is vital for achieving key development goals, including poverty eradication, reduced child mortality, controlled population growth, and gender equality.

The concept of development can be said to be relative since there is no precise definition for it. As a result, it has been defined by various people in different ways. According to Okoye (2005), development implies not simply an increase in the productive capacity or income, which may mean just growth without development, but major transformations in the socio-economic structures whose inequalities and rigidities resulting from outmoded systems have tended to inhibit the development of many third world countries. Almaric (2007) defines development as a path of societal evolution that combines structural changes with improvement in people's welfare. For any development effort to succeed, it has to be people-oriented and focused. Ani (2002) opined that Nigeria should embark more on training and education of its citizens outside the formal school system, which will help to achieve rapid economic and national development. Through literacy education, the country can produce skilled

youths capable of understanding the problems and needs of society and be able to direct activities towards the fulfilment of national goals.

Literacy education aims to promote the social, economic, and political empowerment of youth. However, the success of adult literacy programmes depends largely on adequately motivating young people. Without proper motivation and engagement, challenges such as poverty, malnutrition, disease, and the continued marginalisation of young women may persist. Furthermore, the high rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria remains a pressing concern that underscores the urgent need for effective literacy education initiatives. In Nigeria, statistics show that almost 75% of youth who are able and willing to work cannot find gainful employment. As a result, youths are either unemployed or exposed to crime (William, 2003). Oghenekohwo (2013) asserted that poverty is one of the leading problems in youth development in Nigeria because of the inability to secure jobs. The rate of poverty in Nigeria is devastating. Thus, poverty impedes youth development and learning. In Nigeria, every youth wants to live an affluent life even without working. From different forms of scams to dealing with drugs, the lifestyle of most youths today is bad and totally underwhelming. As such, literacy education is crucial in Nigeria because many youths will be given various vocational training courses in carpentry, hairdressing, soap-making, and vocational skills. All these will help them set up small business ventures, which can give them the opportunity to improve their standard of living and provide for their families.

According to the research conducted by Mporu (2005), there has been increasing literature on health-attaining behaviours and health services provided in the context of educational awareness. Another study conducted by Afzal (2012) examined the relationship between education and economic growth. It revealed that investment in education is a multi-dimensional mechanism that ultimately results in the development of the nations. Education helps increase productive capacity, which brings poverty to lower levels, and this increased productivity helps economic growth (Kim and Terada -Hagiwara, 2010). Fiedrich and Jellema (2003) state that a substantial body of evidence indicates that literacy education increases the productivity and earning potential of a population. An educated person earns more and has greater labour mobility. Indeed, literacy education can lead to growth and development through both private and public sectors. It is imperative that for any country to achieve sustainable growth and development, the government intensify its efforts on youth development. Apart from this, the development of human capacity among the youth will help to reduce the rate of crime, which is paramount among the youth. More importantly, literacy education will also enhance youth participation in politics, and their involvement in community development programmes will also be improved.

Human development is seen as an enlargement of human capacities, where the strategy is to promote investment in the development of people through education. It is necessary to apply the theory of human capital to educational systems. By such means, productivity is enhanced and sustained based on an increased and diverse labour force. All these factors are interrelated, as participation in community development programmes fosters political engagement, enhances vocational skills, improves health standards, and ultimately contributes to the economic development of both individual youths and the nation as a whole. To this end, human capacity has been developed using literacy education programmes as an intervention.

Literacy education has been cited as a key in reducing poverty levels around the world (Martela and Pessi, 2022) as it can positively affect many dimensions of poverty. Results show that adult education has a role to play in nurturing the skills and knowledge necessary to both reduce the risk of poverty, but also for providing the capacity to withstand poverty-inducing pressures. EAEA (2010) underlines the empowering role that adult education can have in times of crisis, providing a stable community, a chance for reorientation, a safe place and social recognition. Also, in the United Kingdom, the Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning (IFLL) (Sabates, 2008) concludes that participating in adult learning can help substantially to reduce poverty by enhancing employment prospects, improving the health levels of poor people and giving better chances of acquiring the tools needed to run their own lives. Therefore, it should be a part of any approach to reducing poverty, as multiple initiatives are required to lift people out of poverty.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by Human Capital Theory, which originates from the field of labour economics. The theory was extensively developed by Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964), with Becker's seminal work *Human Capital* emphasising the critical role of education in economic development. He argued that while physical capital contributes to income growth, it plays a relatively minor role compared to the impact of education and skills development. The theory gained prominence during the 1960s as the economic value of education—particularly in areas like military technology and skills training—became more evident. Human Capital Theory has since become central to contemporary education policy discourse globally. It frames education as an investment that yields high returns for individuals and society alike, contributing to national productivity and long-term development. In this context, education is considered a cornerstone of the knowledge-based economy, linking skill development and training with economic prosperity.

Over the past two decades, globalisation has shifted the focus of economic activities from manual labour to knowledge and intellectual capabilities, further elevating the role of education (Gillies, 2015). Accordingly, Human Capital Theory has evolved to emphasise not only the economic value of education but also its role in personal and societal development. Modern theorists have expanded the theory to include the broader aims of education, such as human well-being, civic participation, and personal growth, beyond mere financial gain (Gillies, 2011). In this study, human capital theory provides a framework for understanding the relationship between literacy education and youth development. This includes participation in community development programmes, improved health standards, political engagement, economic empowerment, and vocational skills acquisition. However, the study also highlights that the impact of literacy education on health outcomes among youths in the Ilorin Metropolis remains limited. For instance, inadequate sanitation infrastructure contributes to the prevalence of diseases such as cholera and typhoid. Furthermore, the high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases among youth—linked to unprotected sexual activity—underscores gaps in health education. Okoye (2005) similarly observed that poor health conditions and lack of awareness regarding disease prevention significantly influence youth mortality rates in Nigeria.

Problem Statement

Youth development is essential to societal progress, as young people form the foundation for future economic growth, social stability, and innovation. However, in Ilorin Metropolis, persistent challenges such as unemployment, poverty, social vices, and limited personal growth opportunities continue to undermine youth potential. A key contributor to these challenges is inadequate access to quality literacy education. Literacy education goes beyond basic reading and writing— it includes critical thinking, communication, digital literacy, and the ability to navigate an increasingly complex, information-driven world. Despite efforts by both governmental and non-governmental organisations to promote literacy, many youths in Ilorin Metropolis still face significant barriers. These include unequal access to education, underfunded literacy programmes, outdated teaching resources, and a shortage of well-trained educators. Moreover, the role of literacy education in shaping key aspects of youth development—such as employability, civic participation, and social integration—remains underexplored and underutilised.

If these issues remain unaddressed, the cycle of underdevelopment, social exclusion, and economic stagnation among youths in the Ilorin Metropolis may persist, thereby impacting the broader community. There is a pressing need to investigate the role literacy education plays in fostering youth development and to identify ways to impro-

ve its impact. Many scholars have carried out various research on literacy education and development. Among these were. William D (2003) Literacy and proficiency of youth evidence of converging socio-economic gradients. Fiedrich M and Jellema A. (2003). Literacy, gender and social agency; adventures in empowerment. Dauda, R.O (2010). Investment in education and economic growth in Nigeria. Therefore, this study sought to examine the influence of literacy education on youth development in the Ilorin Metropolis, focusing primarily on its impact on youths' involvement in community development programmes, political participation, and vocational skills acquisition. By addressing these gaps, the research aims to contribute to the design of more effective literacy programs that can empower youths and promote sustainable development within the metropolis.

Objective of Study

The specific objective of this study was the influence of literacy education on youth development in the Ilorin Metropolis. The main objectives were:

- i. To identify the ways through which literacy education has influenced the youth in their involvement in community development
- ii. To determine the influence of literacy education on the political participation of youth in the Ilorin metropolis.
- iii. To find out the influence of literacy education on vocational skills acquisition of youth in the Ilorin metropolis.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised for this study:

- i. What is the level of youths' literacy education in Ilorin Metropolis
- ii. What is the extent of youths' involvement in community development programmes?
- iii. What is the extent of political participation among youths in the Ilorin Metropolis?
- iv. What is the level of vocational skill acquisition among youth in the Ilorin metropolis?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided this study:

- H₀₁:** There is no significant influence of literacy education on the involvement of youth in community development programmes in the Ilorin metropolis.
- H₀₂:** There is no significant influence of literacy education on the political participation of youth in the Ilorin metropolis.
- H₀₃:** There is no significant influence of literacy education on the vocational skill acquisition of youth in the Ilorin metropolis.

Methodology

Research approach and design

The study adopted a descriptive research design to obtain information on the influence of literacy education on the following variables: involvement of youth in community development, political participation, health improvement, and vocational skills development.

Study area

The study was carried out in Kwara State, which is made up of three senatorial districts: Kwara South, Kwara North, and Kwara Central. Under these three senatorial districts are sixteen (16) local governments. The study population was comprised of members of the following local government areas in Kwara Central Senatorial District: Ilorin West, Ilorin East, and Ilorin South.

Sample and sampling procedure

The simple random sampling technique was used to select 300 participants for the study. The research was conducted in Kwara Central Senatorial District, which is comprised of the following local governments: Ilorin East, Ilorin West, and Ilorin South. One hundred participants were selected from each of these locales, which make up 300. The research instrument that was used for this study was the Literacy Education and Youth Development Questionnaire (LEYDQ). The instruments measured the following items: literacy education and youth involvement in community development programmes; literacy education and health improvement standard; literacy education and political awareness and participation; literacy education and economic development; Literacy Education and Vocational Skills Development in Ilorin Metropolis. The four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D) pattern was adopted. The experts in the Department of Adult and Primary Education, University of Ilorin, validated the instrument. The suggestions of these experts were incorporated into the questionnaire, and this helped to ensure face, content, and construct validity. Three hundred questionnaires were administered to the participants, which comprised 200 male and 100 female participants. PPMC was used to analyse the results generated, and four hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. A pilot study was conducted in Ifelodun local government, Kwara South Senatorial District, where 90 questionnaires were administered to 50 female and 40 male youth participants. The data collected were analysed with the Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient, and a reliability value of 0.86 was obtained.

Data collection methods

Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire administered to the respondents. The researchers ensured that participation was voluntary and that respondents were not required to provide any identifying information or initials. To maintain confidentiality, respondents were assured that their identities would remain anonymous. The researcher personally distributed and collected the completed questionnaires.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics of percentage were used to answer all the research questions, while inferential statistics of Chi-square were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Data Analysis and Results

Out of 300 (100%) youths sampled for this study, 200 (63.7) were males and 100 (33.3%) were females.

Participants' responses to research questions

Participants' responses were subjected to percentage analysis. Given that the questionnaire on each of the variables contained five items structured in four responses, the minimum, maximum and range scores were 5, 20 and 15, respectively. The range was, therefore, divided into three levels: high, moderate, and low (i.e. $15/3=5$). Thus, respondents' scores that fell within 5 – 10, 11 – 15, and 16 – 20 were categorised as youths with low, moderate and high levels, respectively.

Question one: *What is the level of literacy education for youths in the Ilorin Metropolis?*

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Level of Youths' Literacy Education in Ilorin Metropolis

Levels of Youths Literacy Education	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
High	16–20	113	37.7
Moderate	11–15	144	48.0
Low	5–10	43	14.3
Total		300	100.0

Table 1 indicates that out of 300 (100%) youths sampled for this study, 113 (37.7%) of them were of a high level of literacy education, 144 (48.0%) were of

a moderate level. In comparison, 43 (14.3%) had a low level of literacy education. This finding suggests that there was a moderate level of literacy education among youths in the Ilorin metropolis.

Question two: *What is the extent of youths' involvement in community development programmes?*

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Extent of Youths' Involvement in Community Development Programmes

The extent of youths' participation in community development			
	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
High Extent	16–20	141	47.0
Moderate Extent	11–15	98	32.7
Low Extent	5–10	61	20.3
Total		300	100.0

Table 2 indicated that 141 (47.0%) of the youths were highly involved in community development programmes, 98 (32.7%) were moderately involved in community development programmes, and 61 (14.3%) were of low involvement in community development programmes. Thus, there was a high extent of youth participation in community development programmes in the Ilorin Metropolis.

Question three: *What is the extent of political participation among youths in the Ilorin Metropolis?*

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of the Extent of Political Participation among Youths in the Ilorin Metropolis

Extent of Political Participation	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
High Extent	16–20	173	57.7
Moderate Extent	11–15	101	33.7
Low Extent	5–10	26	8.6
Total		300	100.0

Table 3 reveals that 173 (57.7%) of the youths highly participated in politics, 101 (33.7%) moderately participated in politics, and 26 (8.6%) of the participants had a low extent of political participation. This finding suggests that political involvement among youths in the Ilorin Metropolis was of high importance.

Question four: What is the level of vocational skill acquisition among youth in Ilorin metropolis?

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of the Level of Vocational Skills Acquisition Among Youth in Ilorin Metropolis

Level of Vocational Skill Development	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
High	16–20	89	29.7
Moderate	11–15	127	42.3
Low	5–10	84	28.0
Total		300	100.0

Table 4 showed that 89 (29.7%) of the youths were of a high level of vocational skill development, 127 (42.3%) were of moderate level, and 84 (28.0%) of the participants were of a low level of vocational skill development. This finding suggests that there was a moderate level of vocational skill acquisition among youth in the Ilorin metropolis.

Hypotheses testing

The hypotheses formulated in this study were tested using chi-square at 0.05 levels of significance.

H₀₁: There is no significant influence of literacy education on the involvement of youth in community development programmes in the Ilorin metropolis.

Table 5

Chi-Square Statistics Showing the Influence of Literacy Education on the Involvement of Youth in Community Development Programmes in the Ilorin Metropolis

Literacy Education		involvement in community development			Total	df	-cal	Sig	Remark
		Sometimes	Rarely	Always					
Low	Count	43	0	0	43				H₀₁ Rejected
	Expected	8.7	14.0	20.2	43.0				
Moderate	Count	18	98	28	144	4	378.717 _a	0.000	
	Expected	29.3	47.0	67.7	144.0				
High	Count	0	0	113	113				
	Expected	23.0	36.9	53.1	113.0				
Total		61	98	141	300				

*Significance at $p < 0.05$

As shown in Table 5, the χ^2 -value 378.717 was obtained with a p-value of 0.000 when computed at a 0.05 level of significance. Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This finding implies that there was a statistically significant influence of literacy education on the involvement of youth in community development programmes in the Ilorin metropolis ($\chi^2_{(4)} = 378.717$; $p < 0.05$).

Ho2: There is no significant influence of literacy education on the political participation of youth in the Ilorin metropolis.

Table 6

Chi-Square Statistics Showing the Influence of Literacy Education on the Political Participation of Youth in the Ilorin Metropolis

Literacy Education		Political Participation			Total	df	-cal	Sig	Remark
		Moderate	High						
Low	Count	26	17	0	43				Ho2 Rejected
	Expected	3.7	14.5	24.8	43.0				
Moderate	Count	0	84	60	144	4	286.209 _a	0.000	
	Expected	12.5	48.5	83.0	144.0				
High	Count	0	0	113	113				
	Expected	9.8	38.0	65.2	113.0				
Total		26	101	173	300				

*Significance at $p < 0.05$

As indicated in Table 6, the χ^2 -value 286.209 was obtained with a p-value of 0.000 when computed at a 0.05 level of significance. Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis two was rejected. This finding indicates there was a statistically significant influence of literacy education on the political participation of youth in the Ilorin metropolis ($\chi^2_{(4)} = 286.209$; $p < 0.05$).

Ho3: There is no significant influence of literacy education on the vocational skill acquisition of youth in the Ilorin metropolis.

Table 7

Chi-Square Statistics Showing the Influence of Literacy Education on Vocational Skill Acquisition of Youth in Ilorin Metropolis

Literacy Education		Vocational Skill Acquisition			Total	df	-cal	Sig	Remark
		Sometimes	Rarely						
Low	Count	43	0	0	43				H₀₃ Rejected
	Expected	12.0	18.2	12.8	43.0				
Moderate	Count	41	103	0	144	4	317.619 _a	0.000	
	Expected	40.3	61.0	42.7	144.0				
High	Count	0	24	89	113				
	Expected	31.6	47.8	33.5	113.0				
Total		84	127	89	300				

*Significance at $p < 0.05$

Table 7 revealed that the χ^2 -value 317.619 was obtained with a p-value of 0.000 when computed at a 0.05 level of significance. Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis three was rejected. This finding implies that there was a statistically significant influence of literacy education on vocational skill acquisition of youth in the Ilorin metropolis ($\chi^2_{(4)} = 378.72; p < 0.05$).

Results and Discussion

The study's findings have revealed a significant relationship between literacy education and youth involvement in community development in the Ilorin Metropolis. This implies that literacy education enhances youths' participation in community development. This result concurs with Oghenekohwo's (2013) assertion that literacy education leads to all-round development. Hence, literacy education promotes youths' involvement in community development. The outcome of hypothesis two showed a significant relationship between literacy education and youth's involvement in political participation in the Ilorin Metropolis. This finding concurs with Dauda (2010), who opined that literacy education is a means of liberating people. This may be true because an educated person is set free from the disease of ignorance, which might reduce the level of political participation of youths. This result is against that of Yesufu (2000), who discovered that literacy education leads to improvement in socioeconomic development and health. Similarly, the findings demonstrated a significant relationship between literacy education and vocational skills development in the Ilorin Metropolitan City. This implies that literacy education correlates with the vocational skills development of youths. This finding is consistent with Chukwuemeka (2009), who averred that literacy education improves other skills of an individual, such as vocational skills and numeracy skills. Education is a means of acquiring necessary skills, which is

the likely reason for the significant relationship between literacy education and vocational skills.

Conclusion

Youth participation in politics will enhance their development because they will have the opportunity to contest for election through the political party platform. Thus, literacy education, which they have acquired, also helped them to make good political decisions. Literacy education has a positive influence on youth involvement in vocational skill development. The implication of this is that it will help to alleviate poverty among youth. It could be concluded that the participation of youth in community development has been enhanced through literacy education. The implication of this is that several projects have been executed in various communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the literacy education curriculum should be revised in order to focus more on skills acquisition for the youths. At the same time, the government and relevant stakeholders should allocate more resources to literacy education initiatives in the Ilorin Metropolis. This includes providing modern teaching materials, improving infrastructure, and equipping learning centres with digital tools to enhance learning experiences. All stakeholders in education should provide the necessary support since there is a significant relationship between literacy education and vocational skills. Literacy education should de-emphasise theory and focus on practical aspects of the curriculum in order to make youths independent after the acquisition. Similarly, literacy education should be based on individual and societal needs so as to achieve the general development of the communities. It should also prepare the participants for literacy education to be useful to themselves and contribute to the social, economic, and political development of their communities.

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