



Importance of extension programme on the economic empowerment of adult education graduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of extension programmes in adult education on the economic empowerment of adult education graduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. A survey research method was adopted for the study. The population consists of two hundred and three (203) graduates from department of Adult and Continuing Education in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The study found out that the extension programmes in adult education improved entrepreneurial skills, the programmes enhanced ability to innovate and adapt to changing economic environment, the programmes provided networking opportunities that improved economic prospects among others. The study recommended that the institution should continually update and align the adult education curriculum with relevant and current market needs and industry standards. This will ensure that graduates acquire relevant skills that can directly contribute to their career growth and economic empowerment, also the educational institution should adopt flexible learning options, such as hybrid and online learning platforms, to accommodate the unique needs of adult learners who often balance education with work and family responsibilities. This approach can enhance participation and retention rates and more so the policymakers should allocate more funding to adult education programmes to enhance resources, facilities, and teaching quality. This investment will help provide comprehensive support services, including career counseling and mentorship, which can improve learner outcomes.

Keywords: Extension Programmes Adult Education Economic Empowerment Graduates

Introduction

Extension programmes refer to organized educational initiatives aimed at disseminating knowledge, skills, and practical applications to improve practices in various fields, such as agriculture, health, and community development. These programmes are pivotal in promoting community development and empowering individuals with the necessary skills to enhance their quality of life (Ewert & Grace, 2020) ^[4]. Typically offered by educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and government bodies, extension programmes help bridge the gap between academic research and its application in real-world scenarios. Ewert and Grace (2020) ^[4] define extension programmes as "organized educational initiatives that focus on the dissemination of knowledge, skills, and practical applications aimed at improving practices in various fields such as agriculture, health, and community development." This definition emphasizes the educational nature and broad scope of extension initiatives designed to enhance community well-being.

Also, extension programmes can also be described according to Rogers (2018) ^[6] as "a process of transferring knowledge from research and academic institutions to the broader community to enable them to improve their practices and decision-making. This highlights the role of extension services in bridging the gap between research and real-world applications. Anderson and Feder (2021) ^[2] state that extension programmes are services that offer technical knowledge and practical assistance to people, particularly in rural areas, to support their development and improve their livelihood. This definition underscores the practical nature of extension programmes in fostering economic and social development.

Extension programmes in adult education play a critical role in equipping adults with the knowledge and skills necessary

for personal development, community engagement, and economic empowerment. These programmes are designed to offer flexible and accessible learning opportunities outside the formal education system (Bello *et al.*, 2019) ^[3]. They address the needs of adult learners who may have missed out on formal education or wish to improve their skills for better employment prospects and social participation. The essence of extension programmes lies in their adaptability and community-focused approach. According to Ewert and Grace (2020) ^[4], these programmes aim to bridge the gap between academic research and its practical application by providing tailored learning experiences that respond to the unique challenges faced by adult learners. They often cover areas such as literacy and numeracy, vocational skills, health education, community development, environmental sustainability, and leadership training (Rogers, 2018) ^[6].

In many developing countries, including Nigeria, extension programmes have been instrumental in supporting adult education initiatives. Oluwatayo and Ojo (2022) ^[5] note, these programmes of being contributing significantly to rural development by empowering adults with skills that foster self-sufficiency and economic resilience. For instance, agricultural extension programmes provide training on modern farming techniques, enabling farmers to increase productivity and adopt sustainable practices (Ajani & Igbokwe, 2019). The success of extension programmes often depends on the strategies employed in their implementation. For instance, participatory approaches that engage community members in decision-making are known to be more effective than top-down methods (Anderson & Feder, 2021) ^[2]. This participatory model ensures that the specific needs and preferences of the target audience are considered, thereby improving the programme's relevance and impact.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the numerous benefits and potential of extension programmes in adult education, several challenges hinder their effectiveness and accessibility. In many cases, these programmes face issues such as inadequate funding, lack of skilled personnel, poor infrastructure, and limited awareness among the target population (Bello *et al.*, 2019) [3]. Additionally, the design and implementation of these programmes often fail to consider the unique needs of adult learners, particularly in rural areas, where socioeconomic and cultural factors significantly influence participation and engagement.

Coming to Nigeria, while extension programmes have shown promise in promoting rural development and economic empowerment, their impact remains limited due to structural and systemic challenges. Many adult learners in rural areas struggle to access these programmes due to barriers such as long distances to learning centers, high costs of participation, and lack of flexible scheduling. Furthermore, the over-reliance on traditional teaching methods and a top-down approach often alienates community members, reducing the effectiveness of these initiatives. The inability to fully leverage participatory approaches in programme design and delivery further exacerbates the problem.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine:

1. the impact of extension programmes in adult education on the economic empowerment of adult education graduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Research Question

A research question guided the study.

1. What are the impacts of extension programmes in adult education on the economic empowerment of adult education graduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Review of Related Literature

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, introduced by economist Gary S. Becker in 1964, is a foundational concept in economics and education that emphasizes the value of investing in individuals’ skills, knowledge, and abilities to enhance productivity and economic growth. The theory posits that investments in education, training, and health are akin to investments in physical capital, as they improve the efficiency and productivity of individuals, ultimately

leading to greater economic returns (Becker, 1964). Becker’s work was influenced by earlier economists like Adam Smith and Alfred Marshall, who recognized the importance of labor quality. However, Becker’s approach Human Capital Theory provides a robust framework for analyzing the impact of extension programs in adult education on the economic empowerment of graduates by emphasizing the relationship between education, skill development, and economic productivity.

Method

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The study will be carried out in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, (UNIZIK). NAU is a Federal University located in Anambra State, South-East Nigeria. A vibrant academic community known for its rich diversity in both people and culture. The population consists of two hundred and three (203) graduates from department of Adult and Continuing Education in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. This is because they represent a critical group directly impacted by adult education programme. Stratified sampling techniques was adopted with the use of Taro Yamane’s formula to draw up the entire population which was considered a representative of the whole population. The sample size was 135. The instrument for the study was structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The instrument was titled; impact of extension programmes on the adult education on the economic improvement of adult education graduates Questionnaire (IEPAEGQ). To ascertain the validity of the instrument, two copies of the IEPAEGQ including the title, purpose of the study and research questions were given to two research experts in the department of Adult and Continuing Education and one expert from Educational Foundations in Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Data for the study were collected by the researcher and two research assistants through the administration of a Google form questionnaire. The researcher created a link to the Google form for easy access of adult education graduates. To reach the respondents, the researcher utilized various platforms, including WhatsApp and alumni associations, to distribute the questionnaire. Data collected in conduct of this study was analyzed using mean ratings. The decision mean was computed by adding all the weights attached to the points and dividing the sum by the number of options:
 $SA = 4, A = 3, D = 2, SD = 1$

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Data collected in respect of the research question presented in table 1.

Table 1: Mean ratings of the extension programmes in adult education on the economic empowerment of adult education graduates.

S/N	Extension programmes in adult education on the economic empowerment of adult education graduates.	SD 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL	MEAN	DECISION
1	The extension programmes in adult education improved my entrepreneurial skills.	64 256	24 72	30 60	17 17	135 405	3.0	Agreed
2	The programmes enhanced my ability to innovate and adapt to changing economic environment.	82 328	25 75	13 26	15 15	135 444	3.28	Agreed
3	The programmes provided networking opportunities that improved my economic prospects.	75 300	29 87	27 54	4 4	135 445	3.29	Agreed
4	The programmes enhanced my ability to secure better-paying jobs.	62 248	40 120	18 36	15 15	135 419	3.10	Agreed
5	The programmes provided me with relevant skills for self-employment.	66 264	35 105	24 88	10 10	135 467	3.45	Agreed
6	The extension programmes equipped me with skills to	79	26	23	7	135	3.31	Agreed

	create employment opportunities for others.	316	78	46	7	447		
	Grand Mean						3.20	Agreed

Table 1 showed the mean ratings of the extension programmes in adult education on the economic empowerment of adult education graduates. The results indicate that items 1 to 6 had mean scores of 3.00, 3.28, 3.29, 3.10, 3.45, and 3.31, respectively, with an overall grand mean of 3.20. These results demonstrate that respondents strongly agreed on the positive impact of extension programmes in adult education on the economic empowerment of graduates from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Summary of the Finding

The findings from Table 1 indicate that respondents strongly agreed on the positive impact of extension programmes in adult education on the economic empowerment of graduates from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. This is evidenced by mean scores for items 1 to 6, which range from 3.00 to 3.45, with an overall grand mean of 3.20.

Discussion of the Finding

The results from the research question one, which focused on the impact of extension programmes in adult education on the economic empowerment of graduates, revealed several key findings. The study showed that the extension programmes significantly enhanced graduates' entrepreneurial skills, equipping them with the ability to innovate and adapt to a dynamic economic environment. Also, the programmes provided valuable networking opportunities that improved graduates' economic prospects. Graduates reported that the programmes also played a crucial role in helping them secure better-paying jobs. Moreover, the extension programmes equipped them with relevant skills for self-employment and provided the tools necessary to create employment opportunities for others. These findings highlight the substantial contribution of extension programmes to the economic empowerment of adult education graduates. The findings of this study align with the work of Anderson and Feder (2021) ^[2], who describe extension programmes as "services that provide technical knowledge and practical assistance to individuals, supporting their development and enhancing their livelihoods. The results are consistent with the study by Bello *et al.* (2019) ^[3], which emphasizes that extension programmes are designed to offer flexible and accessible learning opportunities beyond the formal education system. These studies reinforce the importance of extension programmes in fostering economic empowerment and personal development for adult education graduates.

Conclusion

The study concludes that extension programmes in adult education play a crucial role in fostering the economic empowerment of graduates. By enhancing entrepreneurial skills, expanding networking opportunities, and providing access to better employment prospects, these programmes contribute significantly to graduates' ability to navigate and succeed in a competitive economic environment.

Implication of the Study

The findings of this study have several important implications for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders

in adult education. Overall, the study underscores the critical role of extension programmes in shaping the economic futures of adult education graduates and calls for continued efforts to enhance their effectiveness and accessibility.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and implications of this study, several recommendations are suggested to enhance the effectiveness and impact of adult education programmes:

1. The institution should continually update and align the adult education curriculum with current market needs and industry standards. This will ensure that graduates acquire relevant skills that can directly contribute to their career growth and economic empowerment.
2. The educational institution should adopt flexible learning options, such as hybrid and online learning platforms, to accommodate the unique needs of adult learners who often balance education with work and family responsibilities. This approach can enhance participation and retention rates.
3. Policymakers should allocate more funding to adult education programmes to enhance resources, facilities, and teaching quality. This investment will help provide comprehensive support services, including career counseling and mentorship, which can improve learner outcomes.

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