

Functional Adult Literacy: A Tool for Enhancing Artisans Entrepreneurship Skills Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The traditional meaning of literacy as the ability to read and write has continued to evolve in recent times in order to accommodate other natures of literacy. It is now clear that there is not one literacy but multiple literacies found in different domains of people's daily lives. Functional literacy is this the application of literacy skills to the day to day activities of an individual to function in his environment. Artisans takes a larger percentage of Nigeria's workforce and has for generations, continued to be a provider of employment. However, many artisans have become redundant and irrelevant as a result of lack of awareness and inability to recognise opportunities due to illiteracy. This paper therefore seeks to explore functional adult literacy education as a tool for enhancing artisans' entrepreneurship skills development in Nigeria. Effect of literacy on artisans' entrepreneurship skills development was examined as well as the challenges of functional literacy education. This paper concluded that functional adult literacy has the potential to enhance artisans entrepreneurship skills and accord them the ability to meet up with demand of the ever changing world. This paper recommended the need for government to make functional literacy accessible for everyone at all government levels and urge the leadership of artisans' association to encourage its members to acquire literacy skills in order to improve their entrepreneurship skills and relevance.

Keywords: Functional Adult Literacy, Artisans, Entrepreneurship skills development.

Introduction

Attention has recently been drawn to the importance of acquiring vocational skills as a way of reducing unemployment and breeding responsible citizens that contribute meaningfully to the overall development of the country. Government, as well as non governmental organizations have

continued to advocate the need to complement formal education certificates with additional skills having realized that white collar jobs are no more guaranteed for the ever increasing graduate population. Artisans constitute a larger percentage in Nigeria's workforce and while some of them are literate and possess the ability to adapt to the changing needs of the current age, many had become redundant and irrelevant because of their inability to cope with the trends due to illiteracy and lack of exposure.

Artisans are skilled craft workers who make or create things by hand and their activities are often characterized by low entry requirements in terms of capital and professional qualifications, the small scale of operations, skills often acquired outside of formal education and labour-intensive (Onwe, 2013). These activities include carpentry, hairdressing, fashion designing, plumbing, electrician, panel beating, artist and so on. In his report, Victor Gbonegun (2024) revealed that there are over four million artisans in the country but getting adequately skilled ones among the volume has been tough over the years, forcing contractors and housing developers to engage artisans from Benin Republic, Ghana, and Togo for construction work. However, many of the foreign artisans have left the shores of the country due to the devaluation of the local currency as the value of wage earned is depleted by persisting inflation, which rose to 33.20 per cent as of March 2024, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

The reason to the above observation could be as a result of the inability of our artisans to adapt and cope with modern ways of doing things. Many artisans failed to upgrade and re-learn, thereby find it difficult to connect technology with works. It becomes a thing of disappointment when others could not relate with customers using basic communication skills due to language barrier. Many also fail to recognise opportunities due to lack of awareness and illiteracy. Some artisans find it difficult to communicate with simple English language during negotiation with customers. Some resort to seeking for interpreters nearby which sometimes impedes communication and affects their standard.

Over the years, it has been observed that the impact of literacy on reshaping the mind and remolding people to adapt to the dynamic societies cannot be over-emphasized. Literacy enables an individual to reflect and relate well with his environment. It provides proper awareness and grooms the mind towards the development of innovative ideas and creativity. Functional literacy refers to the application of literacy skill to the day to day activities. It is different to the traditional literacy in the sense that functional literacy addresses immediate needs that allows an individual

to effectively function in his Community rather than future application of knowledge. By 1978, UNESCO's General Conference adopted a definition of functional literacy – still in use today – which states: ‘A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development.’(UNESCO,2017).

Concept of Functional literacy

Traditionally, literacy is defined as “the ability to read and write” (UNESCO, 2000:1). However, Sichula and Genis (2019) indicated that there has been a shift from seeing literacy as merely the ability to read and write to using of literacy in everyday life. This is a 21st century shift which has been inspired by data coming out of research on literacy in communities among people that are labeled as illiterate (Sichula, 2018). It is now clear that there is not one literacy but multiple literacies found in different domains of people's daily lives (Sichula, 2018). For this reason, literacy is used in a much wider and broader sense to refer to multiple literacies with multiple skills and competencies. Among the literacies include ‘information literacy’, ‘financial literacy’, ‘computer literacy’, ‘visual literacy’, ‘media literacy’ and ‘scientific literacy’, among others.

Sichula (2018) contended that functional literacy is a concept that was introduced by UNESCO in the 1960s. The idea was to make literacy useful as opposed to merely teaching learners how to read and write for the sake of doing so. Similarly, Kasonde and Changala (2019) stated that, functional literacy is when a person has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable them to engage in the activities that will improve their wellbeing. Functional literacy is this the application of reading and writing to daily activities of an individual. It is the utilization of reading and writing skills to improve one's socioeconomic life. Mkandawire (2018: 46) observed that:

...in a society, literacy can be applied in several ways such as reading a newspaper, medical prescription, bible, receipt from a shopping mall are all examples on the applications of functional literacy in the society. Writing or reading anything such as sign post, letter, poem and others are applications of functional literacy.

The above quote only attests to the fact that functional literacy focuses more on practical application of literacy skill to daily activities rather than the tradition meaning of reading and writing.

Akpama (2009), viewed functional literacy as a deliberate attempt to combine literacy and numeracy with a program of education in basic vocational skills directly linked to the occupation needs of participants. The emphasis of functional literacy is to improve the individual on skills so acquired. Functional literacy also involved training and retraining individuals in specific careers of their choice and interest in order to increase their productivity and contribute to personal and socioeconomic development of their Communities.

Functional literacy is crucial for enhancing artisans' innovative skills and productivity. It provides them with necessary tools needed to move with the flow of life. Functional literacy improves their relevance and gives them room to reflect on the best way to meet with ever-changing demands of the populace. Functional literacy should be part of an overall educational plan for artisans to become active members of society. With a functional literacy program, artisans will be equipped with desirable knowledge and skills which will enable them to take their rightful positions, increase their level of awareness, promotes their relevance and continue to be a source of employment for the unemployed populace. All these will lead to improvement in their standard of living and overall development of the country.

This explains the reason why Eyitayo (2019) opined that literacy education for artisans is important because it will be of great benefit to individual and members of the society, It will dictate the quality of end products of their entrepreneurial skills. With the acquisition of literacy education, individual will be empowered to take proper decision about improving his productivity, think positively when it comes to issues relating to politics, social life and improvement or advancement in his/her standard of living. When artisans are able to improve the quality of their productivity, this will have positive effect on the rate of technological advancement of a country. Acquiring literacy education skills empowers an individual to think positively, take good decisions about life and the society, encourages him/her to take and improve on his productivity, this will help him socially, economically and politically.

The growing demand of literacy skills among artisans can not be underestimated. The gap between literacy and skill acquisition has continued to increase on a daily basis due to the fact that skilled workers with less tenable educational qualifications have increasingly been marginalized in Nigeria. This is due to lack of inclusive education that can cater for them. Hence, the need for provision of a lifelong learning that allows this set of people to function well with their contemporaries in other fields.

Concept of Artisan Entrepreneurship

Artisan entrepreneurship dates back to the seventeenth century, as presented by Friedrichs (1976) in his research on wool weavers in the German city of Nordlingen facing difficulties in dealing with economic and environmental changes. According to Nason (1984), environmental dynamism did not only occur in the seventeenth century, but also occurred in the following period, during which US commercial companies aimed to enhance the quality of handicrafts to adapt to market changes and open new markets abroad. The development of artisan entrepreneurship is currently increasing because artisan entrepreneurship is at the heart of the creative economy (Rashid, 2021), one of the subsectors of the creative industry (Pret & Cogan, 2018), and due to the expansion of creative industries and increased focus on homemade goods and services (Bislimi, 2022).

Solomon and Mathias (2020) define artisan entrepreneurship as work completed by individuals who emphasize manual production, independence above conglomeration, local community above scale, and value creation above profit maximization. The existence of artisan entrepreneurship is important because of the shift towards more culture-based businesses and increasing emphasis on local, handcrafted goods related to an area's culture and tourism. Furthermore, products such as local food and handmade clothing related to the cultural heritage of entrepreneurs (Tregear, 2005) are becomingly increasingly in demand. Culture also determines the context and environment (i.e. place, time, and certain stimuli), in which social origins, culture, and shared traditions are maintained across generations, and artisan entrepreneurship develops identity from crafts or commerce (Hoyte, 2018).

The Concept of Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship development is a programme of human capital development. It is a requirement for instilling and preserving entrepreneurship climate in an economy. According to Agbanu (2006), entrepreneurship is a term used broadly in connection with the innovative modern industrial leaders. At times, the entrepreneurs are assumed to be owners of one man business. In the view of Folahan and Omoniyi (2006), entrepreneurial traits include: confidence, independence, individuality, optimism, need for achievement, profit oriented, persistence, perseverance, determination, hard work, drive, energy, initiative, risk taking ability, like challenges, leadership behaviour, creative, flexible, gets along with others well, responsive to suggestions, criticisms, innovative, resourcefulness, versatile, knowledgeable, foresighted and perspective.

AzubuikeAzubuike (2006) views entrepreneurship as a means of having the ability to find and evaluate business opportunities, gather the necessary resources, initiate appropriate plan of action to ensure success, and implement actions to take advantage of the opportunities for rewarding outcome. Terry and Franklin (1982) summarize various definitions of entrepreneurship as follows:

Entrepreneurs are persons who conceive the idea for a new business venture, gather the necessary human, financial and physical resources to start the venture; start the operations of the venture and grow it to the point where more people are added to the organization and they usually bear the most personal and financial risk in beginning the venture.

Inegbenebor (2006) observes that education, training and experience can increase the supply of entrepreneurs by making available more skills which are suitable for entrepreneurial endeavours. The above destination is a testament that functional literacy education can increase artisans' entrepreneurship skills development if properly utilized.

Effect of functional literacy on artisans entrepreneurship skills

Vocational skills acquired in training centers or through apprenticeship schemes need literate persons for success to be recorded; going by the Nigerian Policy of Education, education should be for self-reliance (FRN, 2004). This means that everyone must be opened to a process of information acquisition in order to access valuable information and avoid being outdated. As Okerulu (2003) states, information technology (IT) has recreated limitless opportunities for open access to information. This call for the development of information literacy skills as part of functional literacy education as those skills, according to Julian (2002), will enable users to make efficient and effective use of information sources. Everyone in any vocation should have the ability to locate, manage, evaluate and use information for problem solving concerning their areas of vocational specialization. Familumo and Oyelade (2012) state that social thinkers centuries ago were unanimous in their thought that artisans in any society were the monetary of economy.

Challenges of Functional Literacy Education in Nigeria

Achieving functional literacy in Nigeria will mean resuscitating Adult and Non-formal education which had hitherto been neglected in favour of the conventional formal education system in Nigeria. Establishment of more centers for Adult education in the country should be embarked upon so that everybody will have easy access to literacy education and thus become more functional on their job performance and in the society in which they live, so that the national objectives will be realized and constitutional provision will also be realized which mandated every

Nigerian to acquire basic education without discrimination i.e young, adult, male, female, physically challenged and disadvantaged group etc. (FGN, 1999).

Kadiri, (2006) pointed out some challenges of functional Adult literacy in Nigeria;

- i. Poor political will by the government
- ii. Un trained facilitators
- iii. Low image from the people
- iv. In adequate learning centers
- v. Poor funding
- vi. Non involvement of stake holders in the planning of functional illiteracy programmes.

Some other challenges of functional literacy education in Nigeria may include;

- a. Lack of consideration for Socio cultural values and economic patterns of the recipients into the programme.
- b. Poor consideration to train indigenous facilitators who will specifically work and integrate adult functional literacy with community development and for effective communication.
- c. In adequate learning materials

Conclusion

Functional literacy is a tool that fosters development of an individual. It has the potential to enhance artisans entrepreneurship skills development and accord them the ability to meet up with demand of ever changing world. Artisans constitute large percentage of the Nigeria's workforce and have continued for generations to be providers of employment in the country. However, majority of these set of people are becoming more and more irrelevant and neglected because of their inability to use simple language for communication, read and write simple terms and recognise opportunities due to illiteracy. They therefore need functional literacy education to improve their artisans entrepreneurship skills and increase their relevance which in return, enables them to cope with the dynamic world.

Recommendations

The importance of functional adult literacy education cannot be over emphasized for the enhancement of artisans entrepreneurship skills. In order to achieve this, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Government should make functional literacy education accessible for artisans at all levels of government.
2. while the federal level does not lag behind in funding adult and non-formal education, adequate attention should be given to the implementation of this programme at the state level
3. Leadership of all artisans association should make effort to encourage their members to acquire literacy skills in order to compete with the demand of ever changing world
4. Awareness programmes should be organized consistently for artisans in order to recognise opportunities when presented.
5. Artisans should learn to incorporate the utilization of ICT in their work in order to to remain stagnant and neglected

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