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ASSESSING THE EDUCATIONAL PREFERENCES OF RURAL NIGERIAN POOR IN CROSS RIVER STATE

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Abstract

This study was designed to assess the educational preferences of rural Nigerian poor. Four research questions were formulated to guide the study and the structured interview was used to elicit information on their preferences. Four hundred respondents were purposively drawn from the ten wards of Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State Nigeria. The responses were coded on a scale of preferred, not preferred to not sure. Data collected was analyzed using simple percentage. Results showed that respondents showed less preference for basic literacy-related programmes, while expressing strong preference for work-oriented functional literacy, vocational education and educational programmes that offered practical skills, recommendations were made on the basis of these findings.

Keywords

Education, Preferences, Rural, Poor Literacy, Vocational Training, Work-Oriented Literacy

1. Introduction

The place of education in the socio-economic, political and technological development of any nation is no long in doubt. Education has been identified as the singular most powerful tool for bringing about individual, group, community and national

development and progress. Different wise sayings, anecdotes, clichés and theories have developed around education, as a way of emphasizing its importance to the development of human societies, and the creation of a safe, stable and prosperous world order.

Often, we hear such anecdotes as education being an instrument par-excellence (Nigerian National Policy on Education, 2014) the pen being mightier than the sword; no nation's educational system being able to rise above the quality of her teachers, etc. All these sayings underscore the value that even undemocratic nations attach to education. Indeed, it has been argued by some scholars that education is also a manipulative tool in the hands of despotic leaders, who, they claim can use it (education) to either brainwash or ensure perpetual subjugation of their citizenry.

Studies abound to show a strong link between access to qualitative and quantitative education and the quality of livelihood or poverty levels of citizens, (Obajan, 1996). The pivotal status of education as an instrument for liberating people from the shackle of poverty hanger and underdevelopment can never be more highlighted than in the efforts of global initiatives of world bodies such as UNESCO, FAO, UNDP etc, through programmes such as the Education for All (EFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), etc. It is instructive to note the place of prominence given to education, and its link to poverty reduction and sustainable development. It is important to also emphasize here that looking analytically at the sustainable development goals for instance, goal four, which is quality education, we realize that the attainment of all other goals will be dependent on the provision of goal four. How for instance is it possible to achieve zero poverty, zero hunger, gender equality, decent work, sustainable communities, etc. Without a requisite education that equips people with the skills, knowledge and competencies that can support these.

In spite of the importance of education to both personal and group development, the issue of access to education remains not just a problem, but a threat to achieving the ideals of cross-national governments in achieving composite development. Whereas in the developed world educational programmes are tailored to meet the needs of its recipients, and the immediate environment, experience has shown that governments in the underdeveloped third world countries tend to approach educational issues without the enthusiasm, passion and relevance it requires. It has been reported in several studies, like Ojo (2006), Obajan (1996) that the issue of equality of educational opportunities forms part of the political discourse in Nigeria, often taking up the colouration of campaign promises rather than the serious business it ought to be.

It has been established that there is a strong link between education and improvement of quality of life, also between education and poverty reduction, especially among rural dwellers, who are said to be among the poorest of the population. As a matter of fact, rural poverty accounts for more than 83% of the 95% poverty figure in Nigeria (Betiang, 2012). According to the Cross River State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS, 2016), a review of development experience shows that the most effective way of achieving rapid and practical sustainable development is in improving the quality of life of the poor in the rural areas. This, they argue, can be achieved through poverty reduction programmes, through among other things, the provision of basic social services, especially primary education, etc for disadvantaged population. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2006) underscores the primacy of this need in her report education for rural people in Africa. They note that as majority of the world's poor, illiterate and undernourished live in rural areas, it is a major challenge to ensure access to quality education. They reveal further that the lack of learning opportunities is both a cause and effect of rural poverty, hence education and training strategies need to be integrated within all aspects of sustainable rural development, through plans of action that are multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary (FAO, 2006). It is against this background that this study was carried out to assess the educational preferences of rural poor in Cross River State.

Educational activities around the study area revolve around basic literacy and numeracy programmes for beginners, post basic literacy for learners who have learnt how to read, write and count. Ordinarily, in addition to these, there ought to work-oriented literacy programmes, functional literacy and vocational literacy and training programmes which are capable of equipping the recipients with practical life skills incorporated into the educational programme of the rural people.

2. Statement of the problem

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2014) as reviewed is a comprehensive document which provides the framework and roadmap within which educational provisions are made in the country. The document deals with all levels of education, ranging from pre-primary, through secondary to tertiary education. The policy includes provisions for adult and non-formal education, vocational and technical education as well as special education. However, it has been observed that in spite of the beauty and the lofty provisions in this national policy, access to education is quite limited and hence poverty remains very pervasive and widespread among the rural poor. The questions that agitated the minds of the researchers were is it that the education provided is not enough, or is it inappropriate or it is

non-existent? This question led the researchers to attempt to assess the educational preferences of rural Nigerian poor from themselves, with a view to determining what form(s) of educational programme(s) they actually desire. This was the gap that the current research sought to fill.

3. Theoretical framework

This study was anchored on a member of theories, which strive to justify the need for expanding access to education. Theory of equal educational opportunities (Enis 1976). Theory of justice and equal educational opportunities – Larry O. Wilkins (2013) between Enis and Larry O. Wilkins, these theories posit that equality of educational opportunities is not only desirable, but it is also a fundamental human right, a desired of which creates a situation of injustice. For Enis, all men being born equal should have equal access to educational opportunities. While Wilkin draws attention to the illegality of denying a certain segment of the population, access to education.

4. Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study was to assess the educational preferences of rural Nigerian poor. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the educational preferences of rural poor
2. Find out if the rural poor preferred basic literacy education
3. Investigate if the rural poor prefer to have basic skills training
4. Determine if the rural poor would prefer work-oriented functional literacy.

5. Research questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What are the educational preferences of rural poor?
2. Do the rural poor have a preference for basic literacy education?
3. Do the rural poor prefer to have basic skills training?
4. Would the rural poor prefer work-oriented functional literacy?

6. Methodology

The survey research design was used for this study, with the use of interviews to collect data, since the subject were predominantly illiterate, hence could not have been expected to respond to a printed questionnaire. The population for the study comprised all

illiterate adult males and females living in Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State. Stratified and purposive sampling techniques were used to select a sample size of 400 respondents. Stratified sampling was used to identify all the ten wards in the local government area, while four communities each were selected from each ward. Four communities was adopted because on the average, each ward is made up of four communities. Purposive sampling was used to select ten respondents from each of this villages, and the sample was intentionally representative five males, and five females per village. Each ward therefore provided forty respondents, and the total sample size for the ten wards in the local government was 400.

The instrument for data collection was a structured interview schedule with 8 questions, which sought to elicit information on the educational preferences of the respondents. The schedule contained items with both open-ended responses and closed responses. The items sought information on respondent's preference for basic literacy education, basic skills/vocational training and work-oriented functional literacy, and leisure education.

The researchers conducted the interviews with the aid of ten part-time volunteer research assistants who were ordinarily resident in these wards and communities. The information obtained from the interview was coded and processed for interpretation using simple percentage.

7. Results

Research question; what are the educational preferences of rural Nigerian poor? Here the researchers asked the respondent to state in their own words what kind of education they felt could help them achieve a better livelihood. They were presented with questions that sought to find out the purpose for which they needed education. The questions ranged from education that equipped them with reading and writing skills for its own sake, which is basic literacy, writing their own letters, keeping records of accounts of their business or other transactions, getting paid employment. other questions focused on education for improving their performance in their trade and farm, learning a skill/vocation; learning a skill together with reading and writing skills, and education for learning about national and world issues. Responses to each question was evaluated on the basis of positive and negative represented by preferred, not preferred, and not sure. A percentage higher than 50 indicated that the respondents either preferred or not preferred as the case may be. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Summary of simple percentage of the educational preferences of rural poor*

Preferred %	Preferred	%	Not preferred %	%	Not sure	%
Reading all printed materials for their own sake	120	30	280	70	Nil	Nil
Writing my letters myself	150	37.5	250	62.5	30	7.5
Keeping records of account in my business	380	92	18	4.5	2	5.0
Getting employment	320	80	80	20	Nil	
Performance in my trade/farm	370	92.5	30	7.5	Nil	
Learning a skill	310	77.5	40	10	50	12.5
Learning a skill together with reading and writing	390	97.5	Nil	Nil	10	2.5
Learning more about national and world issues	170	42.5	230	57.5	Nil	

7.1 Discussion of Results

From the results obtained, 120 respondents representing 30% indicates that they preferred education that equipped them for reading and writing for its own sake, while 280 respondents, representing 70% indicated their non-preference for this form of education. This showed a negative preference for basic literacy. In response to preference for writing skills, 150 respondents representing 37.5 percent expressed preference, while 250 respondents representing 62.5 percent indicated their non-preference for this form of education.

On the education that will allow them be able to perform their daily tasks better, 380 respondents, representing 95% indicated their preference while 18 respondents, representing 4.5% indicated their non-preference. Two respondents were not sure of what they wanted. On using education for the purpose of employment, 320 respondents representing 80% showed preference while 80 respondents representing 20% showed non-preference. Also on improving performance in their trade or farm, 370 respondents representing 92.5% expressed preference, while 30 respondents, representing 7.5% expressed non-preference. On learning a skill (vocational education), 310 respondents, representing 77.5 expressed preference while 40 respondents expressed non-preference, while 50 respondents representing 12.5% were not sure of what they wanted.

In response to their preference for learning a skill together with learning how to read and write, 390 respondents, representing 97.5 expressed preference for this mode of education, while 10 respondents, representing 2.5 did not know or were not sure of what they wanted. Also, on education for the purpose of just learning about national and world issues, 170 respondents expressed preference, while 230 respondents, representing 57.5% expressed non-preference.

From the results of the findings, it could be concluded that the rural adults tended to show greater preference for functional education, work-oriented literacy and vocational education. Their preference for this form of education is not a derogation from the value of basic literacy, but it could be concluded that they tend to prefer education that they can immediately put into use, or an education which could help them secure a livelihood in future. They tended to be averse to literacy or education for its own sake, but education for the value that it provides.

8. Recommendations

Based on the result of this study, it could be recommended that:

1. Providers of educational services should de-emphasize literacy for its own sake and emphasize functionality in education
2. Teaching of reading and writing should be combined with practical useable
3. As much as possible literacy or education should be need work-oriented
4. Aggressive educational needs assessment should precede the commencement of educational programmes.
5. Further research can be conducted in the area of educational delivery modes and systems among the study population. This will indeed enable us to begin to develop a practical framework for addressing the educational preferences of the rural poor, moving beyond the theoretical to the practical approaches to providing education to such disadvantaged groups.

6. Limitations

This research was clearly hampered by the little sample that was used. In addition to this perhaps the results could have been different if more of the target population was sampled.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, it will be noted that the immediate functional value of any programme will be more readily accepted and embraced. With the exigencies and challenges of daily livelihood, It is important to emphasize that twenty first century education should be made more relevant, responsive and functional. The era of learning for its own sake is no longer tenable, especially for nations that are desirous of moving forward. It is on this basis that it can be concluded that the rural poor in Nigeria actually prefer a practical-oriented education to s liberal “bookish” education.

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