

## WOMEN EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN BEKWARRA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*This study examined the relationship between women education and community development in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to ascertain how women exposure to different adult education programmes in the community contributes to community development. The study was guided by two objectives, two research questions and two null hypotheses. This study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was made up of 400 adult learners selected from six (6) adult learning centers in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State. The sample of the study comprised two hundred and sixteen (216) adult learners (women only) in six (6) adult learning centers in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State. The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. The questionnaire was validated by an expert in the Department of Continuing Education and Development Studies and two experts in Measurement and Evaluation, University of Calabar. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the two hypotheses at 0.05 significant level. The findings of the study revealed that functional literacy programme and vocational training programme have significant relationship with community development. The study concluded that women education impacts positively on community development.*

**Key words:** Community, Development, Education and Women.



### Introduction

Education generally is widely acknowledged as a fundamental catalyst for sustainable community development and socioeconomic advancement globally. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2015) emphasized that education equips individuals with knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to contribute meaningfully to society. Among the various dimensions of education, women's education has been extensively documented to produce profound positive effects on families, communities, and national development. Educated women are more likely to participate actively in economic activities, make informed health decisions, and support the education of their children, thereby breaking cycles of poverty and underdevelopment (World Bank, 2018, Niyi et al, 2023). In Nigeria, despite constitutional provisions guaranteeing equal access to education, gender disparities in educational attainment persist, particularly in rural areas. Socio-cultural norms, poverty, inadequate educational infrastructure, and early marriage constitute major barriers to girls' education (Eze, 2019; Edoho et al, 2024; Bessong et al, 2024; Omong et al, 2023).). These challenges are especially prevalent in the northern and southeastern parts of

the country, including Cross River State, where traditional gender roles often relegate women to domestic responsibilities with limited opportunities for formal education.

Bekwarra Local Government Area (LGA), situated in the northern part of Cross River State, is primarily a rural agrarian community. The economy depends heavily on subsistence farming, with limited industrialization and infrastructure development (Cross River State Ministry of Education, 2020). The socio-cultural environment in Bekwarra, like many rural Nigerian communities, strongly influences gender roles and expectations. Akanbi and Udoh (2019) reported that girls in Bekwarra Local Government Area often face early marriage pressures, financial constraints, and a lack of parental support for continued schooling. Consequently, female literacy rates and school completion rates lag behind those of males, limiting women's opportunities to contribute to economic and social development within the community. The link between women's education and community development in Bekwarra is critically important yet underexplored. Community development requires the active participation of all members, but when women are excluded due to low educational attainment, the overall capacity for progress is diminished. Educated women are more likely to engage in community leadership, participate in local governance, and promote health and social welfare programs (UNICEF, 2021; Paul et. at, 2019; Olowonefa & Olofu, 2023). Therefore, improving access to and quality of women's education is essential to enhancing the community's development trajectory. Based on this, the study sought to investigate the relationship between women education and community development in Bekwarra Local Government Area.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the recognized importance of women's education as a key driver of community development, Bekwarra Local Government Area in Cross River State continues to experience significant challenges in ensuring adequate educational access and attainment for women and girls. Socio-cultural barriers such as early marriage, gender discrimination, and traditional norms limit female participation in formal education. Additionally, economic hardships and inadequate educational infrastructure exacerbate the problem, resulting in low literacy rates and high dropout levels among girls in the area. These challenges have broader implications for community development, as uneducated women are less likely to engage in economic activities, participate in decision-making processes, or contribute effectively to social welfare initiatives. Consequently, the full potential of women as agents of change remains untapped, hindering overall community progress. Although recent interventions and political developments signal positive changes, there is limited research that specifically examines how the level of women's education affects community development outcomes in Bekwarra LGA. There is also a lack of detailed understanding of the specific barriers women face in accessing education and the strategies that could effectively enhance their educational attainment and community participation. Therefore, it is in line with the above problem that the present study sought to determine the extent to which the provision of women education through functional literacy programme and vocational training programme to women tend to influence community development in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between women education and community development in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. determine the relationship between functional literacy programme and community development.

- ii. ascertain the relationship between vocational training programme and community development.

### **Research questions**

The under listed research questions guided the study:

- i. How does functional literacy programme relate to community development?
- ii. To what extent does vocational training programme relate community development?

### **Statement of hypotheses**

In order to answer the above research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

- i. There is no significant relationship between functional literacy programme and community development.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between vocational training programme and community development.

### **Literature review**

#### **Functional literacy programme and community development**

The concept of functional literacy is often referred to as a model which deals with the 3Hs. That is the Heart, Head and the Hand. Functional literacy proposes that the 3HS can be gainfully employed so that communities can benefit from the education it gives to its adults (Wacker, 2020; Ihekoronye et al, 2020; Niyi et al, 2024; Ubana et al, 2025)). It is a form of adult education programme that can be given to women, and it deals with selective and intensive literacy education that is tailored towards a particular need. Functional literacy is a basic requirement and at the same time a means of fulfilling one's desire.

Angandung (2021) see functional literacy in the context of community education as one that gives prominence to any organized activity whose purpose is to foster in the community, the development of attitudes, knowledge, skills and the development of values which will equip him to perform his role in the community in creative fashion thereby improving his socio-economy well-being. It provides learners the access to knowledge that could enable them acquire new skills which could make him participate more effectively in order to contribute significantly to the achievement of organizational objectives. According to Bessong et al (2024) and Ubana et al (2024), functional literacy emphasizes the all-round development of basic skills and the effective use of these skills' individual or adult's development and community improvement. The objectives of functional literacy according to Egbunu (2022), generally concede with the overall development objectives of a community which addresses such issues as education for all, health for all etc, thus skills, knowledge and values derived from functional literacy programmes can address the needs and the behaviours of community members towards community development projects. Uye (2023) assessed the influence of functional literacy on community development in Eleme Local Government Area of River State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two objectives and one hypothesis. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was made up of 244 women in Eleme Local Government Area of River State. The sample of the study comprised 129 women selected using simple random sampling technique. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Mean, standard deviation, t-test and ANOVA were used for data analysis. Result indicated that there is significant influence of functional literacy on community development in Eleme Local Government Area of River State.

Mbata (2021) carried out a study on the relationship between functional literacy and community development in Badawa Local Government Area of Kano State. Two objectives and one null hypothesis were structured to guide the study. Survey research design guided the

study. The sample of the study was one hundred and fifty (150) women in Badawa Local Government Area. While questionnaire was used for data collection, ANOVA was used for data analysis. The results indicated that there was significant relationship between functional literacy and community development. In the same vein, Okora (2020) ascertained the relationship between functional literacy and community development in Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State. One research question and one null hypothesis were used for the study. The research design used was correlation. The sample of the study was one hundred and three (103) women in Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State. Interview and questionnaires were used for data collection. Regression analysis was used for data analysis and the result reviewed that there is significant relationship between functional literacy and community development in Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State.

Kolaiwole and Adepoju (2023) as well as Niyi and Olofu (2023) posited that functional literacy goes beyond being able to read and write, it is rather an emancipator practice that requires people to above all, use their basic literacy knowledge to solve their socio-cultural problems. Ugwuji (2020) examined the relationship between functional literacy and community development in Ikorodu Local Government Area of Lagos State. The purpose of the study was to determine whether functional literacy enhances community development. Survey design was adopted for the study. The sample of the study was made up of 1500 women of which data were collected via questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed using percentage and linear regression. The result of the study showed that there is significant relationship between functional literacy and community development in Ikorodu Local Government Area of Lagos State.

### **Vocational training programme and community development**

Vocational education is the type of education that seeks to uncover, discover or bring to light the natural inclination of an individual, particularly in adult and encouraging such individuals to continuously improve and bring out the best through further studies and practice (Patrick (2022). Every human being has a call or vocation for a particular endeavour and thus call is normally taped through vocational education (Okri et. al, 2020; Ibu et. al., 2019; Oyita et al., 2018; Usua et al, 2023; Uye, 2023, Ebele & Olofu,2020; Patrick & Obibessong, 2021)). In the view of Mbata (2021) and Patrick et al (2024), vocational education is an aspect of education designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding, attitude, work, habits, appreciations encompassing knowledge and information by workers to enter, make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis. It follows therefore that vocational education is not only design to bring out the skills or abilities in a person but helps the individual to improve on suck skills and become more proficient. Agabi (2020) cited in Egbunu (2022) observed that having women educated through vocational training programmes make them to participate more effectively in community development process for better and increased learning standard for the people. The promotion of basic literacy is part of a wider effect directed towards increasing awareness among most developing communities. For instance, if a substantial percentage of the adults are literate, the new literate will help to increase participation and efficiency (Ibu et. al., 2019; Inyang et. al., 2020).

Angandung (2021) investigated the relationship between vocational literacy and community development in Aba, Abia State, Nigeria. The study made use of three objectives and two null hypotheses. The research design adopted for the study was descriptive survey. The population of the study comprised 425 women of which 115 women were randomly selected through simple random sampling technique. Data were collected through questionnaire. Data gathered were analyzed with t-test. The finding of the study showed that

there is significant relationship between vocational literacy and community development in Aba, Abia State.

Anyanwu (2022) conducted a study on vocational literacy and economic development in Jigawa State. One hypothesis guided the study. The study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The sample of the study was made up of 150 women. Interview was the instrument used for data collection. Independent t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significant level. The findings revealed significant correlation between vocational literacy and community development.

Agusiobo (2021) assessed the relationship between vocational training programme and community development in Kutungura Local Government Area of Kano State, Nigeria. Case study research design guided the study. A sample size of 120 women was selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected through questionnaire. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used for data analysis. The findings revealed significant relationship between vocational training programme and community development in rural communities in Kutungura Local Government Area of Kano State.

Skills development improves output, quality, diversity, and occupational safety. It also improves health thereby increasing incomes and livelihood of the community members. Skills training also help to develop, knowledge about informal sector association, rural organization and governance. Women education facilitates knowledge and skills of community members by helping them to have skills in managing participatory, discovery-based learning as well as technical knowledge to guide the groups learning and action process (Opara et al.; 2020; Bruin & Duruskong, 2020; Effiong & Olofu, 2016; Effiong & Olofu, 2018; Patrick & Omang, 2022).

### **Methodology**

This study adopted correlation research design. This design involves the collection of data to describe existing phenomena accurately and objectively. The population of the study comprised four hundred (400) adult learners (only women) in 6 literacy centres in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. This population was considered suitable because they are the ones undergoing literacy programmes in the learning centres. A manageable and sizeable sample size of 216 respondents was selected for the study using simple random sampling techniques” The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire titled: “Women Education and Community Development Questionnaire (WECDQ).” designed by the researcher and validated by three experts. One in measurement and evaluation and two in department of Continuing Education and Development Studies, University of Calabar – Calabar. To determine the reliability of the instrument a trial testing was done using 50 respondents drawn from the study area with similar characteristics who were not included in the main study. A set of items was administered to the respondents after an interval of two weeks. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was used to test the degree of consistency of the instrument. They were found to range from .72 to .87. This implies that the instrument was reliable enough to be used for this investigation. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient statistical technique was used to analyzed data for the study.

### **Presentation of results**

The two research hypotheses were stated and tested to provide solution to the problem of this study. Each hypothesis was tested at .05 significant level.

Hypotheses one: There is no significant relationship between functional literacy programme and community development.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between functional literacy programme and community development

Variables	<u>X</u>	SD	r-value	Sig.
Functional literacy programme	18.08	3.16	0.308	.000
Community development			17.84	1.43

\*Significant at .05, p-value = .000, df = 198

Data in table 1 examined the relationship between functional literacy programme and community development. To test the hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was employed. The result of the analysis revealed that the calculated r-value is 0.308 while the p-value is .000. The decision rule states that when the calculated r-value is higher than the p-value, the null hypothesis should be rejected while the alternative should be accepted. Hence, since the calculated r-value of 0.308 is greater than the p-value is .000, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between functional literacy programme and community development stands rejected. Therefore, the study indicated that there is significant relationship between functional literacy programme and community development.

**Hypothesis two:** There is no significant relationship between vocational training programme and community development.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between vocational training programme and community development

Variable	<u>X</u>	SD	r-value	Sig.
Vocational training programme	17.70	1.64	0.255*	.000
Community development	18.74	1.43	18.74	1.43

\*Significant at .05, p-value = .000, df. = 198

Data in table 2 ascertained the relationship between vocational training programme and community development. To test the hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used. The result of the analysis revealed that the calculated r-value is 0.255 while the p-value is .000. The decision rule states that when the calculated r-value is higher than the p-value, the null hypothesis should be rejected while the alternative should be accepted. Hence, since the calculated r-value of 0.255 is greater than the p-value is .000, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between vocational training programme and community development is rejected. Thus, the study showed that there is significant relationship between vocational training programme and community development.

### **Discussion of findings**

Data in table 1 examined the relationship between functional literacy programme and community development. To test the hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was employed. The result of the study revealed that there is significant relationship between functional literacy programme and community development. The above result corroborates with that of Akapama (2001) cited in Bong (2020) who stated that

effective implementation of functional literacy programme is one of the measures which may be employed to address the issue of high level of backwardness and non-contribution of women in community development activities. The linkage between functional literacy and improved members represents a shift from the perception of literacy as a means to development.

The findings of the study also align with that of Uye (2023) who assessed the influence of functional literacy on community development in Eleme Local Government Area of River State, Nigeria. The result indicated that there is significant influence of functional literacy on community development in Eleme Local Government Area of River State. In the same vein, Mbata (2021) carried out a study on the relationship between functional literacy and community development in Badawa Local Government Area of Kano State. The finding showed that there was significant relationship between functional literacy and community development. The findings of the study were also in line with that of Okora (2020) who ascertained the relationship between functional literacy and community development in Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State. Result indicated significant relationship between functional literacy and community development in Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State.

Data in table 2 ascertained the relationship between vocational training programme and community development. To test the hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used. The finding showed that there is significant relationship between vocational training programme and community development. The above finding agrees with that of Agabi (2020) cited in Egbunu (2022) who observed that having women educated through vocational training makes them to participate more effectively in the development process for better and increased learning standard for the people. The promotion of basic literacy is part of a wider effect directed towards increasing awareness among most developing communities. For instance, if a substantial percentage of the adults are literate, the new literate will help to increase participation and efficiency.

The findings also corroborate with that of Angandung (2021) who investigated the relationship between vocational literacy and community development in Aba, Abia State, Nigeria. The study revealed that there is significant relationship between vocational literacy and community development in Aba, Abia State. Similarly, the study also aligns with that of Anyanwu (2022) who conducted a study on vocational literacy and community development in Jigawa State. The finding revealed significant correlation between vocational literacy and community development.

### **Conclusion**

Women education plays pivotal role in community development. Based on the result of the study, it was concluded that the exposure of women in the community to functional and vocational literacy programmes promotes community development in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Women in every community within the study area and beyond should be constant and continuously provided with functional literacy programmes in order to equip them with the knowledge necessary for modern day survival and community development.
- ii. The government and NGOs should provide vocational training programmes for community members especially the women population; so that they can acquire relevant skills for self-reliance and community development.

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