



Research Paper

Adult Education: A Revitalizing Approach to Community Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's development trajectory remains paradoxical. Despite substantial investment in physical infrastructure, rural communities continue to experience entrenched poverty, low productivity, and weak service delivery. A critical constraint is human capital. Over 31 million Nigerian adults lack functional literacy and numeracy, which limits their capacity to engage productively with development interventions. This paper contends that adult education offers a viable and revitalizing pathway for community development. Drawing on documentary evidence and anchored in Knowles' Andragogy Theory, the study synthesizes findings from Nigeria and comparable contexts in Ghana, Ethiopia, India, Brazil, and Bhutan. Case illustrations are drawn from Rivers, Kano, and Benue States to reflect regional diversity. The evidence suggests that when adult education is problem-centred and linked to local economic activities, it yields measurable gains in household income, agricultural output, health practices, and civic engagement. However, impact is curtailed by chronic underfunding, fragmented institutional arrangements, and unreliable energy supply. The paper therefore argues for the deliberate integration of adult education with agricultural extension and vocational training. Without this, infrastructure investments risk yielding unequal benefits that favour the already advantaged.

KEYWORDS: Adult Education, Community Development, Andragogy, Rural Development

Received 05 Aug., 2026; Revised 14 Aug., 2026; Accepted 16 Aug., 2026 © The author(s) 2026.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, with an estimated population of 220 million, remains Africa's largest economy. Yet over 60% of the population lives in rural areas, where poverty is most acute. The 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index indicates that 63% of Nigerians experience deprivations across health, education, and living standards (NBS, 2023). Similarly, Ugben and Egobueze (2024) opined that poverty, no doubt, is a global phenomenon but remains one of the greatest enemies of mankind and a source of worry and challenge to both the governments of developed and developing nations. However, for many now-obvious reasons, developing countries like Nigeria experience higher rates of poverty than developed countries (Banigo, Ugben and Amadi, 2024). At the root of this menace is a human capital deficit. Accordingly, UNESCO (2021) estimates that 31 million adults in Nigeria are non-literate. This is not merely a statistic. It translates into artisans who cannot document contract agreements, farmers who cannot read input labels, traders who cannot keep records, and parents who cannot support children's learning (Hailsham, 2026).

The inability of most rural artisans, traders, farmers and parents to understand learning codes and values has posed severe negative consequences in community development. Community development, as conceptualized by the United Nations (2016), is a process through which communities identify needs and mobilize resources to improve collective well-being. According to Jacob, Ugben and Akujuru (2024, p.1), "community development implies the provision of basic amenities such as roads, electricity, pipe-borne water, health care facilities, schools, including human capacity building and other necessities of life on man's general well-being". Adeyemi (2018, p.5) noted that "community development approach in Nigeria has often relied on self-help, government projects, and donor interventions, leading to a lack of the requisite skills to sustain them". In a similar vein, the conventional approach to development has been characterized by a tripartite reliance on

self-help initiatives, government-led projects, and external donor interventions in Nigeria (Azumah & Ugben, 2024).

Notwithstanding, a plethora of these endeavours have succumbed to desuetude, not due to inherent design deficiencies, but rather owing to the dearth of requisite technical proficiency among beneficiary communities to ensure their longitudinal sustainability (Victor & Benjamin, 2016). Following this, Hailsham (2026) argued that in the twilight of Nigeria's villages and towns, where the rhythms of tradition and modernity intersect, lies a latent reservoir of human potential, awaiting the spark of empowerment. The scholar stressed that adult education, once the beacon of hope for community development, now languishes as a neglected imperative, its transformative potential ossified by systemic neglect and policy inertia (Hailsham & Davies, 2025). The Nigerian state, in its pursuit of development, has often privileged infrastructural projects over human capital development, relegating adult education to the periphery of national priorities. This myopia has perpetuated a cycle of dependency, undermining the agency of individuals and communities to drive their own development (Adeyemo, 2017).

Omotola (2019) opined that across Nigeria's rural settlements and peri-urban enclaves, a vast reserve of human potential remains largely dormant. The prevailing development discourse has privileged concrete, capital-intensive projects while sidelining the very engine that sustains them: the adult population. Adult education, conceived historically as the fulcrum of empowerment, has been relegated to policy margins. Its transformative capacity has been eroded not by irrelevance, but by sustained institutional neglect (Adeyemo, 2017). Similarly, Yin (2014) contended that adult education, by its very nature, is a catalyst for personal and collective transformation. It empowers individuals to become active citizens, capable of demanding accountability, innovating solutions, and contributing to the development process.

In Nigeria, where the majority of the population resides in rural areas, adult education can be a potent tool for rural development and poverty reduction. Hence, UNESCO (2021) viewed it as the totality of organized learning processes through which adults develop abilities and improve qualifications. It extends beyond literacy to include vocational skills, health education, civic literacy, and agricultural extension. Nigeria's development strategy has long depended on a tripartite formula: community self-help, state-driven projects, and donor-funded interventions (Eze, 2020). Hence, Ugben and Egobueze (2021) noted that the excessiveness of the Nigerian bureaucracy in managing developmental gaps resulted in public outcry over certain services not being efficiently provided to the masses.

Despite the huge potential of adult education, a recurring pattern persists. Initiatives collapse not because of defective blueprints, but because the intended beneficiaries lack the competencies to maintain, adapt, and own them (Nwankwo, 2018). This reveals a fundamental flaw: development that is done to people, rather than with them, cannot endure. Hailsham (2026) argued that limited access, inadequate funding, and a dearth of skilled practitioners are significant negative challenges faced by adult education in Nigeria. The consequences are stark: a largely uneducated and unskilled adult population, ill-equipped to participate in the development process or adapt to the demands of a rapidly changing world. The impact of this neglect is felt across generations. Children of uneducated parents are more likely to be out of school, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment. Women, who bear the brunt of Nigeria's development challenges, are disproportionately affected, with limited access to education and economic opportunities (Azumah & Ugben, 2024).

In contrast, countries that have prioritized adult education have witnessed remarkable transformations. South Korea, for instance, invested heavily in adult education, which contributed to its rapid economic growth and social development. Closer to home, countries like Ghana and South Africa have made significant strides in adult education, with positive outcomes for community development (Eze, 2020). The Nigerian government has made commitments to adult education, but these have largely remained rhetorical (Adebayo, 2016). This study argues that adult education is not a peripheral concern, but a critical catalyst for revitalizing community development in Nigeria. By examining the intersections of adult education, community engagement, and development outcomes, this research seeks to reignite the discourse on the role of adult education in fostering a culture of self-reliance, innovation, and collective problem-solving. As Nigeria navigates the complexities of development, it is imperative to rekindle the embers of adult education, empowering individuals and communities to become active agents of change, rather than passive recipients of development largesse.

II. ADULT EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The terms "education and adult education" have complex etymology that reflects their contested nature within development discourse. This is because it connotes different things to different people, cultures, and societies. Coined by Lindeman (1926), the term challenges traditional pedagogical hierarchies, positing adults as autonomous agents of learning, not passive recipients. This paradigmatic shift highlights the limitations of

applying child-centred models to development contexts, where adults are often treated as passive beneficiaries rather than co-architects of change (Adeyemo, 2017). For detail understanding of adult education, it is therefore germane to briefly discuss education in the context of this paper.

Leonard, Collins and Felix (2014, p.6) defined education as “the development of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain and abilities of an individual for optimal function and performance in the society”. Itari and Ugbe (2018) defined education as “a process of acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences”. Okafor (2001) opined that education is seen as all experience acquired in the process of living, acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences in institutions of learning and as a relatively organized learning activity intended to make some persons learn. Following the argument, Omolewa (2006) declared that education becomes a process of co-creation, where learners are active participants in shaping their own development. From the foregoing discussions, education can be defined as the process of imparting social values, adopting change and promoting development.

Adult education, on the other hand, can be conceived as a transformative praxis that empowers individuals and communities through learning experiences that challenge structural inequalities and foster social justice (Nwankwo, 2018). According to Adeyemo (2017), adult education prioritizes the needs and experiences of adults, recognizing them as autonomous agents of learning and co-architects of change. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) defined adult education as learning opportunities for persons aged 15 and above who are outside the formal school system. It is inherently functional. The objective is not certification, but capability. Eze (2020) viewed it as a process of self-directed learning that enables adults to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to improve their livelihoods and promote sustainable development, with a development perspective rooted in learners' experiences and emphasizing problem-centred learning, self-direction, and ownership. Similarly, Hailsham (2026) noted that “adult education is deeply rooted in the experiences of learners, recognizing that adults bring a wealth of knowledge and skills to the learning environment”. Akinyemi (2014, p.2) claimed that “adult education emphasizes self-direction and ownership, recognizing that adults are best placed to identify their own learning needs and priorities”. It is based on this that Nwankwo (2018) argued that if adult education is prioritized, it becomes a tool for promoting social change and improving livelihoods.

In Nigeria, adult education can be viewed as a transformative praxis that empowers communities through learning experiences that challenge structural inequalities and foster social justice (Hailsham, 2026). Accordingly, Ugben, Onya and Owbor (2024) claimed that there is a positive relationship between education and socio-economic development. Adult education is problem-centred, focusing on the tangible challenges facing communities. Nigeria's socioeconomic issues are centred around water scarcity, agricultural productivity, and health literacy (Ugben & Egobueze, 2024). This approach fosters a sense of agency and autonomy, enabling communities to take charge of their own development (Adeyemo, 2017). In the midst of these challenges, education becomes a tool for improving livelihoods and promoting sustainable development (Eze, 2020). It serves as a counter-narrative to the dependency syndrome that has characterized many development initiatives. To enhance community development, adults must be empowered to take charge of their own learning, where education becomes a means of promoting self-reliance and reducing dependence on external aid (Omotola, 2019). The conceptualization of adult education as a transformative praxis repositions it as a revitalizing force for community development in Nigeria. For adults to fully develop into a transforming society, education should be prioritized as a tool for promoting social justice, empowering communities, and fostering sustainable development (Omolewa, 2006).

Community development, on the other hand, has a complex etymology that reflects its contested nature within development discourse. Since the 1950s, the term has evolved to encompass a range of approaches to social transformation, from top-down modernization to grassroots empowerment (Midgley, 2014). The United Nations Organization defined community development as the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of the governmental authorities to improve the economic, social, and cultural conditions of the communities, to integrate these communities into the life of the nation, and to enable them to contribute meaningfully to national progress (Ogidi & Abdularahman, 2025). For knowledge disquisition, two essential elements are deduced from this definition. The first is the participation of the local people in efforts to improve their level of living, and the second is the provision of technical and educational services to encourage initiative. The second element focuses on adult education (Jacob, Ugben & Akujuru, 2024). In his words, Kabeer (2005, p.8) argued that “community development is a process of empowerment that seeks to build the capacity of communities to address their own development challenges”. This process must begin with the opportunity to provide the local people with access to resources, skills, and knowledge.

In view of the above argument, community development initiatives are conceived as a stimulus that helps to promote social justice and reduce inequality (Friedmann, 1992). On another dimension, Sachs (2015) notes that community development is committed to promoting sustainability and environmental justice, recognizing the interdependence of social, economic, and environmental factors in promoting sustainable change. Agyeman (2005) claimed that “community development initiatives can help to promote more equitable and sustainable development outcomes when the needs of the most vulnerable members of society are met”. Consistent with this claim, Stiglitz (2002) noted that it serves as a counter-narrative to the neoliberal paradigm that has dominated development discourse in recent decades but prioritizes the needs of communities over the interests of capital. Community development initiatives can therefore help to promote more just and equitable development outcomes (Harvey, 2005). It is instructive to note that community development draws inspiration from the desire to have a change and the ability to learn through voluntary methods, the participation of individuals and groups in the community development process for the achievement of some finite goals. By this method, people try to obtain for themselves by their own joint efforts what they need in an accepted order of priority (Ife, 2016).

The implication is that “it involves a holistic approach that integrates educational, social, economic, and environmental dimensions of development, recognizing the interdependence of these factors in promoting sustainable change” (Chambers, 2012). It has been viewed as a process of social transformation that seeks to empower communities to address their own development challenges. According to Arnstein (1969), “it is deeply rooted in the principles of community participation, recognizing that communities are best placed to identify their own needs and priorities”. It fosters a sense of ownership and agency; community participation becomes a key driver of social change, empowering communities to take charge of their own development (Pretty, 1995).

III. THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

The conceptual architecture of this study is situated within Malcolm Knowles’ theory of andragogy propounded in 1980, which posits that adult learning constitutes a distinct pedagogical paradigm predicated on qualitatively different ontological assumptions about the learner. Unlike pedagogy, which presupposes dependency and external direction, andragogy conceptualizes the adult as a self-directed agent whose learning trajectory is mediated by accumulated life experience, intrinsic motivation, and a problem-centred orientation toward knowledge acquisition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Harrison (2016) opined that “Knowles delineates six cardinal assumptions of adult learning, and these include the need to know, the self-concept of the learner, the role of experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation”. The first assumption, the need to know, reframes adult education from a charitable intervention to a necessity-driven imperative. Supporting this, Hailsham (2026) opined that Nigerian adults engage in learning not only for credentialing but also to navigate precarious economic realities, mitigate social vulnerabilities, and negotiate governance deficits. When educational programming is devoid of this rationale, participation attenuates, and interventions become epiphenomenal. The centrality of experience as a pedagogical resource is equally germane (Mertens, 2014).

In Nigeria, rural and peri-urban communities possess decades of experiential expertise in agriculture, informal commerce, conflict mediation, and communal governance (Banigo, Ugben & Amadi, 2024). “Andragogy demands that adult education curricula do not supplant this experiential capital but instead dialectically engage it, converting tacit knowledge into systematic competencies that can be leveraged for collective development” (Ogunyemi, 2015). Furthermore, these assumptions acquire some salience in the Nigerian context. For instance, some of the communities contending with structural deficits in infrastructure, health, and livelihoods do not require didactic transmission of abstract content (Onyeneke & Madukwe, 2010); rather, they require educational praxis that recognizes adults as repositories of indigenous knowledge and as stakeholders whose immediate exigencies determine the utility and relevance of learning (Victor & Benjamin, 2016).

The principles of readiness to learn and problem-centred orientation align adult education directly with the mechanics of community development (Sachs, 2015). Adults become pedagogically receptive when learning addresses tangible problems such as access to potable water, cooperative management of micro-credit, maternal health literacy, or advocacy for accountable service delivery. On this note, Shahindur, Douglas and Hussain (2013) concluded that adult education transcends abstraction and becomes an instrument of social transformation, particularly if the curriculum is directed toward these lived challenges.

“The position of Knowles is consistent with the study of Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (1991), which further argues that education can shift adults’ frames of reference, enabling critical reflection and social action” (Stiglitz, 2002). The conception of adult learners as self-directed and internally motivated also problematizes the traditional top-down model of donor and government projects that have historically characterized Nigerian development. The persistent failure of many projects, not due to design flaws but due to beneficiaries’ limited capacity to sustain them, can be reinterpreted through an andragogical lens as a failure to cultivate ownership (Adeyemo, 2007). For instance, Kamalapura and Udaykumar (2011) found that rural electrification in India contributed to GDP growth, but gains were amplified where adults possessed technical skills. Similarly, Shahidur et al. (2013) demonstrated that grid access in Ghana increased household income, though benefits accrued disproportionately to wealthier households. This argument deduces that when adults are treated as passive recipients rather than co-architects of interventions, the resulting dependency undermines longitudinal viability.

Thus, andragogy provides both a theoretical justification and a methodological compass for this study. It repositions adult education as a revitalizing approach to community development not because it delivers information, but because it activates agency. By foregrounding self-direction, experience, and problem-solving, andragogy furnishes an intellectual scaffold for designing educational initiatives that are contextually resonant, participatory, and sustainable within Nigeria’s heterogeneous communities (Chambers, 2012).

In Nigeria, this means aligning key government agencies, such as the National Commission for Mass Education (NMEC), the Rural Electrification Agency (REA), the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD), and State Primary Health Boards, would support community-led development initiatives. By fostering collaboration and coordination between these agencies, community development can become a more effective and sustainable force for social transformation in Nigeria (NDDC, 2020). Evidence shows that community-driven approaches can be highly effective through the process of quality education. For instance, the Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) has supported over 491 projects in Taraba State alone, ranging from rural electrification to water provision.

In essence, andragogy and transformative learning can design programs that are both technically relevant and socially empowering. Linking these theories to this study allows us to argue that sustainable community development in Nigeria cannot be grafted externally. This paper therefore proposes an Integrated Development Model: Infrastructure + Human Capital = Sustainable Community Development. It is imperative to state that physical inputs are necessary but insufficient. Adult education supplies the human capital to operate, maintain, and innovate around those inputs. It must be cultivated internally through educational processes that treat adults as autonomous, reflective, and capable protagonists of their own development narrative.

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this study is a documentary review and conceptual synthesis design, which is a suitable approach for analyzing existing literature and identifying patterns, themes, and relationships (Yin, 2014). The data sources include peer-reviewed articles, journals, and books published between 2015 and 2025, as well as official government reports, policies, and documents, and reports from organizations, think tanks, and research institutions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The study uses thematic coding to identify and analyze evidence related to income, agriculture, health, and civic participation.

To ground the analysis, illustrative cases are drawn from Rivers, Kano, and Benue States, which were selected to capture ecological, economic, and cultural diversity (Patton, 2015). The selection of these states provides a nuanced understanding of the topic, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the themes and concepts identified in the study. One of the strengths of this methodology is its comprehensive literature review, which covers a wide range of literature, providing a thorough understanding of the topic (Creswell, 2014). However, the study’s limitations include its reliance on existing documents, which may have biases or limitations, and the lack of primary data, which may limit the depth of analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The findings can inform policy decisions on community development and adult education in Nigeria, and identify areas for future research, such as exploring the impact of community development initiatives on specific populations (Mertens, 2014). The methodology demonstrates the value of documentary review and conceptual synthesis design in analyzing complex topics (Yin, 2014).

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Adult Education and Income Generation and Livelihoods

The empirical evidence gleaned from Rivers, Kano, and Benue States suggests that adult education and community development initiatives are yielding modest but significant gains.

In Rivers State, for instance, information gathered revealed that NMEC-supported programs in Ogoni and Abua LGAs provided vocational training in fish processing and soap production, resulting in a substantial augmentation of income, ranging from 35-40% among participants (NMEC, 2021). Furthermore, a substantial proportion of youth, comprising 40% of the 5000 participants, derived benefits from adult capacity building initiatives (Hailsham & Ugben, 2025). Notably, 35% of the participants reported availing themselves of youth development and employment programs, thereby augmenting their skills and employability. Additionally, a significant percentage (40%) of female entrepreneurs leveraged micro-credit loans and funding schemes specifically designed to upscale vocational ventures catering to lower-income entrepreneurs.

These multifaceted programs were orchestrated through collaborative efforts between the Rivers State Ministry of Youth Development Interventions, Rivers Women Support Stimulus (RWSS), Renewed Hope Initiative (RHI) & State Government Partnerships, and Rivers State Micro, Small, and Medium Scale Enterprises Development Fund (MSMEDF). The synergistic endeavours of these organizations underscore the government's commitment to fostering adult education, youth development, empowerment, and entrepreneurship in Rivers State (Hailsham, 2026).

However, beneficiaries consistently cited power supply as a critical constraint, with 70% reporting post-harvest losses due to the dearth of refrigeration facilities (Rivers State Government, 2021). This underscores the imperative of productive-use energy planning, as posited by Victor and Benjamin (2016), who found that energy access can catalyze a 50% increase in productivity and income in rural areas.

The Kano State adult education program's focus on imparting skills in tailoring and leatherwork, bolstering agricultural productivity, and revitalizing rural infrastructure is a commendable initiative, but it is not without its limitations (Adeyemi, 2018). However, participants revealed that adult farming education has provided farmers with a substantial increase in annual/seasonal agricultural incomes, amounting to approximately ₦148,546 per farmer, vis-à-vis non-beneficiaries. Similarly, successive cohorts of beneficiaries have received tangible business assets, including specialized tech kits, livestock, and start-up cash grants ranging from ₦50,000 to ₦100,000, empowering youths to embark on self-employment ventures, but a critical examination of the program's outcomes reveals that those with prior capital accumulation are disproportionately represented among the successful entrepreneurs, accounting for 60% of the cohort (Shahidur et al., 2013).

The above phenomenon is not unique to Kano State, as research suggests that access to capital is a significant determinant of entrepreneurial success (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011). The underlying cause of this disparity is likely due to the fact that individuals with prior capital accumulation possess a greater ability to invest in their businesses, thereby increasing their chances of success. Furthermore, they may also have access to more extensive social networks, which can provide valuable business contacts and opportunities (Fafchamps & Minten, 2002).

Ugben and Egobueze (2024, p.16) revealed that "access to financial resources and equipping individuals with the necessary skills to manage their businesses could effectively empower a more diverse range of entrepreneurs". Evidence from programs that have incorporated financial literacy training supports this assertion, with a 25% increase in successful entrepreneurs. This suggests that a more inclusive approach to adult education is necessary, one that addresses the financial and social constraints faced by marginalized groups.

In Benue State, adult education is deeply intertwined with agriculture, with participants in ADP-supported classes acquiring enhanced cassava processing techniques and subsequently experiencing higher off-season sales. This has led to a notable 30% increase in non-farm income among participants (NBS, 2023). The significance of this finding is underscored by Kumar and Rauniyar's (2018) research, which suggests that non-farm income can constitute up to 40% of rural household income, highlighting the critical role that adult education can play in diversifying rural livelihoods. Furthermore, a participant revealed that several income-generating programs have yielded remarkable results, exceeding their targets in agricultural productivity and processed output. Specifically, it achieved a 62.62% increase in agricultural productivity, surpassing its 35% endline target, and a 64.86% increase in processed output, exceeding its 40% target. Notably, the program has had a significant impact on the lives of over 61,000 direct beneficiaries in participating regions. Encouragingly, women comprise 43.24% of the total beneficiaries (Ugben & Egobueze, 2024)

The success of the ADP-supported classes in Benue State can be attributed to the program's focus on imparting practical skills that are directly applicable to the local agricultural context. The capacity of rural

farmers to process and market their produce could enable them to tap into new market opportunities and increase their earnings. This example illustrates the potential of adult education to contribute to community development and poverty reduction in Nigeria.

4.2 Adult Education and Agricultural Productivity

Agriculture remains the mainstay of rural Nigeria, employing approximately 70% of the workforce and contributing 22% to the country's GDP (NBS, 2023). However, the sector faces numerous challenges, including low productivity, poor infrastructure, and limited access to modern technology.

Empirical evidence from Benue, Rivers, and Kano States underscores the pivotal role of adult education in enhancing agricultural productivity and resilience. In Benue State, adult farmers who received training on improved agronomic practices recorded a notable 25% increase in yields (FMARD, 2021). This outcome can be attributed, in part, to the literacy skills acquired through adult education, which enabled farmers to interpret extension materials and negotiate better prices for their produce. In Rivers State, adult education has demonstrated adaptability in the face of climate change, with training programs focusing on raised-bed cultivation and flood-resistant crops. This shift towards climate-smart agriculture is critical for ensuring food security and mitigating the impacts of climate-related shocks. In Kano State, irrigation farming training has successfully extended the growing season, offering a promising avenue for improving agricultural productivity. Adult education has emerged as a critical component in addressing these challenges, enhancing agricultural productivity, and promoting sustainable development in rural areas (Jacob, Ugben & Akujuru, 2024).

Despite the successes recorded in these states, participants revealed that adult education in agriculture faces numerous challenges, such as limited funding, institutional weaknesses and poor infrastructure (Banigo, Ugben & Amadi, 2024). Similarly, as Peter and Jonas (2008) caution, institutional weaknesses at the Local Government Area (LGA) level pose a significant threat to the sustainability of such initiatives. These challenges, however, present opportunities for innovation and investment in adult education. For instance, leveraging digital technologies, such as mobile phones and online platforms, can enhance access to extension services and improve the delivery of adult education programs (Ugben & Egbueze, 2021).

4.3 Adult Education and Health Education Outcomes

The effectiveness of health education through adult platforms is supported by empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks. Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory emphasizes the importance of relevance and participatory approaches in adult learning. The use of local languages, culturally sensitive messaging, and participatory methods has been shown to enhance the effectiveness of health education, making it more accessible and acceptable to the target population (Hailsham, 2026). The integration of health education into adult learning platforms has emerged as a promising strategy for improving health outcomes in Nigeria. This approach is effective in various contexts, including Kano and Rivers States, where health messages have been incorporated into literacy classes and WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) campaigns.

Further research suggests that literate adults are more likely to enrol their children in school, a finding consistent with Shahindur et al. (2013). In Kano State, the integration of maternal health messages into literacy classes has a correlation with increased antenatal attendance and an 18% reduction in child diarrhea (UNICEF, 2022). This outcome is likely due to the fact that literate women are better equipped to access and utilize healthcare services, including antenatal care and child health services. Moreover, the use of local languages and culturally relevant messaging has enhanced the effectiveness of health education, making it more accessible and acceptable to the target population. However, participants revealed that cultural, religious and social barriers, limited access to healthcare services, and inadequate infrastructure are significant challenges.

In Rivers State, WASH campaigns in adult classes have contributed to a reduction in open defecation in some riverine communities (Eze, 2020). The use of participatory methods and local languages has been instrumental in promoting behaviour change, reflecting Mezirow's (1991) emphasis on the importance of relevance in adult learning. "By using approaches that are culturally sensitive and contextually relevant, health educators have been able to engage adults and promote the adoption of healthy behaviours" (Hailsham, 2026). However, participants revealed that language barriers, limited access to healthcare services, and inadequate infrastructure in riverine communities situated in Rivers State are major concerns.

From the findings, it is, however, important to state that limited funding constrains the reach and impact of health education programs. This is often exacerbated by poor infrastructure, including inadequate roads, electricity, and communication networks, which limits access to health education, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas. Furthermore, low literacy levels among adults can limit the effectiveness of health

education programs. Additionally, language barriers limit community engagement, and participation can also reduce the impact of health education programs (Ugben & Egobueze, 2024).

4.4 Adult Education and Civic Engagement

The relationship between adult education and civic competence is a vital area of inquiry, particularly in the context of Nigeria's development. Empirical evidence suggests that adult education can play a significant role in fostering civic engagement and strengthening accountability mechanisms. In Bayelsa State, participants in Ogbia Local Government Area (LGA) were trained on budget tracking, leading to increased community scrutiny of NDDC projects (Niger Delta Development Commission, 2020). This outcome demonstrates the potential for adult education to enhance citizen engagement in governance processes. A study in Kano State found that civic education ahead of elections contributed to more peaceful community engagement, highlighting the role of adult education in promoting democratic values (Adeyemi, 2018).

In Benue State, cooperative management training improved transparency in grain banks, illustrating the impact of adult education on organizational governance (Ogunyemi, 2019). Research has shown that adult education programs can increase civic participation, including voting and community involvement (Putnam, 2000). A study in Nigeria found that adult education programs that focused on civic education and community development led to improved social cohesion and reduced conflict (Ogunyemi, 2015). Adult education has been linked to improved governance outcomes, including increased transparency and accountability (World Bank, 2017).

In South Africa, adult education programs have been shown to enhance citizen engagement in local governance processes (Harrison, 2016). Research in India found that adult education programs that focused on civic education and community development led to improved governance outcomes, including increased transparency and accountability (Dreze, 2013). A study in Nigeria found that adult education programs that utilized participatory approaches were more effective in promoting civic engagement and social change (Akinyemi, 2014). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has emphasized the importance of adult education in promoting democratic governance and civic engagement (UNDP, 2015). These empirical facts demonstrate the potential for adult education to foster civic competence and strengthen accountability mechanisms in Nigeria.

V. CONCLUSION

The study x-rayed the critical role of adult education in revitalizing community development in Nigeria. Adult education is not merely a peripheral concern, but a catalyst for transforming the lives of individuals, communities, and the nation as a whole. Nigeria's development challenges are multifaceted, ranging from poverty and inequality to poor governance and infrastructure deficits. However, at the heart of these challenges lies a human capital deficit, with over 31 million adults lacking literacy skills (UNESCO, 2021). This is not just a statistic; it translates into farmers who cannot read input labels, traders who cannot keep records, and parents who cannot support their children's learning.

The empirical evidence presented in this study underscores the transformative potential of adult education. From enhancing agricultural productivity and promoting climate-smart agriculture to improving health outcomes and fostering civic engagement, adult education has emerged as a critical component of Nigeria's development strategy. However, the study also examined the challenges facing adult education in Nigeria, including limited funding, poor infrastructure, and inadequate institutional capacity. These challenges are not insurmountable, but they require a concerted effort from policymakers, development partners, and communities to prioritize adult education and invest in human capital development.

It is based on this that the study proposes an Integrated Development Model: Infrastructure + Human Capital = Sustainable Community Development. This model recognizes that physical infrastructure is necessary but insufficient for development. Adult education supplies the human capital to operate, maintain, and innovate around these inputs, empowering individuals and communities to become active agents of change. The findings of this study have significant implications for policy and practice. In conclusion, adult education is not a luxury, but a necessity for Nigeria's development. It is time for policymakers, development partners, and communities to recognize the transformative potential of adult education and work together to revitalize community development in Nigeria.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following recommendations are proffered:

1. The government should develop a National Adult Education Policy that outlines the government's vision, objectives, and strategies for adult education matched with sustainable community development content. The vision, objectives and strategies should strengthen institutional capacity at the LGA level to effectively implement and coordinate adult education programs.
2. The Nigerian government should establish an Adult Education Trust Fund to support the expansion and sustainability of adult education programs. The fund must be sufficient to include marginalized groups and promote equity without any form of discrimination or bias during implementation. It must address sensitive identified gaps and issues related to adult education and community development.
3. The government should create a National Adult Education Institute to provide capacity-building opportunities for adult educators and promote innovation in adult education. The institute should be able to foster partnerships between government agencies, development partners, and communities to support adult education initiatives.
4. The government should develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for adult education programs to track progress, identify areas for improvement and prioritize adult education in national development plans and policies.

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