

Chapter 17

Adult Education and Sustainable Learning Outcome of Rural Widows of Central Northern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

In northern Nigeria, widows' identities and status are defined within the mores, norms, traditional religions, and legal institutions of the cultures of the community. The ethnic cultural laws are oppressive and retrogressive. The nexus of these cultural pressures trigger discriminatory practices that deny school attending widows' access, and completion of primary and secondary levels of education, leaving them literacy bankrupt and unskilled to fend for themselves and their children. These experiences motivated an all women Community Based Organization (CBO) to establish a Widows Training School to educate widows in vocational skills and basic literacy and numeracy. This paper examines research that was conducted with a sample of former graduates and attendees of the Widows Training School (WTS). The study is based on a qualitative educational research orientation, and the case study design. Multi-modal data were derived from Focused Group Interviews (FGIs) and Non Participant Observation (NPO) with a sample population of the widows. Data analysis engaged the qualitative process of transcription, categorization, and generation of codes that were merged into major themes, and presented in the as socio cultural status of the widows in the community; historical foundation, nature and curriculum implementation of the school; and the facets of sustainable learning outcome of the widows.

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INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, adult education is a part of the nation's educational policy, and considered pathway to basic literacy, numeracy, and for poverty alleviation (Federal Ministry of Education of Nigeria, 2000; Omolewa, 1981, 1997). Specific to women adult education, vocational training is greatly emphasized, considering women's cultural role as secondary providers of children's physiological needs, and as nurturers of the family (Blueprint of Women's Education in Nigeria, 1986; Omolewa, 1997). To expand and reinforce the goals of adult education on women at the state, federal, and local levels, previous Nigerian First Ladies (NFLs) established active Vocational Training Project Centers (VTPC) that implemented vocational training projects for rural and urban women. One outstanding rural based vocational training project was the 1987 Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW), whose popularity garnered international recognition by UNESCO and UNIFEM (Babangida, 2005). Currently, the federal Ministry of Women Affairs and the Women's Commission facilitate women's vocational adult education through local government departments of women and youth across the nation. Regardless of these initiatives, it is significant to note that rural women's level of participation is still low, thereby marginalizing their access and attainment of basic literacy and vocational skills that will lead them to progressive and sustainable life style that will change their poor social and economic conditions in the community. To change the situation, an all women Community Based Organization (CBO) was established as the first residential Widows Training School in the rural central northern Nigerian state of Kaduna. The primary aim of the school is to provide vocational skills training, basic literacy and numeracy (at the primary school level), and counseling services for the widows. The secondary purpose of the school is to facilitate graduates to become socially and economically empowered, and self-reliant. The school expects the graduates to not only sustain their learning outcome as new

'small scale entrepreneurs', but to use their basic literacy to access information that will assist them utilize state based legal services to fight back the oppression and discrimination emanated to them by the traditional legal system; as well as exercise and enjoy their human rights and privileges to live independent life styles that are free from cultural victimization and oppression. Since the inception of the Widows Training School (WTS) a research study had never been conducted. So far, my research study is the first to undertake an assessment performance of the school's program and its learning outcome on the widows. Hence, the purpose of this article is to provide an evidence based report on not only the performance of the school, but the extent to which the widows' learning outcomes are sustained in their home communities. In doing so, a cursory look at the extent to which the goals and purpose of the school have been achieved are analyzed, with the anticipation that further research on the school and with similar organizations that focus on the development of widows in the rural area of the country, and indeed the Sub-Sahara African region.

The contextualization presents an overview of my research procedures, followed by a synopsis on the socio-cultural status, and the social and economic realities of the widows. The latter elaborates on the learning motivation for vocational skills and literacy acquisition of the widows. A description of the historical foundations of the school, the nature and implementation of the curriculum are discussed in relation to Adult Educational Theories (AET) of Knox' Proficiency Theory (KPT) (Knox, 1977), and Jarvis Learning Process Theory (JLT) (Jarvis, 1995; 1987) on adult learners' self-determination, intentionality, and rationality. The latter are re-situated to the widows' learning motivations, teaching, and learning praxis. In discussing the major findings of the study excerpts of the widows Focus Group Interviews (FGIs) are cited to support their claims and experiences on the facets of sustainable learning outcome and learning motivation. The concluding section provides a summation of

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