

Effect of Adult Education Programmes on Civic Engagement in Rural Areas of Rivers State

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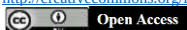
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ABSTRACT

This study examined effect of adult education programmes on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State. Three research objectives, three research questions, and three null hypotheses guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population of the study comprised 712 adult male and female beneficiaries of adult education programmes in various adult education centres in rural communities of Rivers State, made up of 251 males and 461 females. Given the manageable size of the population, the entire population was studied without further sampling. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Effect of Adult Education Programmes on Civic Engagement in Rural Areas of Rivers State Questionnaire" (IAEPCERARSQ). The instrument was validated by the researcher's and two other experts in Adult Education and Community Development, Rivers State University, and its reliability was established using the Cronbach Alpha method, with coefficients for the individual constructs above the 0.70 threshold. The three research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation, while the three null hypotheses were tested using z-test statistics at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that civic education (grand means of 3.29 for male and 3.12 for female beneficiaries), adult literacy (grand means of 3.24 for male and 3.20 for female beneficiaries), and continuing education (grand means of 3.61 for male and 3.59 for female beneficiaries) programmes all have a positive effect on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State, with continuing education rated most highly. The z-test analyses further showed no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female beneficiaries on the effect of any of the three programmes. Based on the findings, the study recommended, among others, that state and local governments and other stakeholders should ensure that civic education, adult literacy, and continuing education programmes are regularly and functionally delivered in rural adult learning centres across Rivers State.

Introduction

Civic engagement in rural areas has become a key concern to academia, stakeholders, and policy makers, as it is an obvious indicator of healthy and successful community life (Serrat, Scharf, Villar, & Gómez, 2020). Yet, rural areas in Nigeria, including those in Rivers State, continue to be characterised by low quality family life, poverty, poor standards of health and education, weak political participation, and widespread mistrust in public institutions, despite constituting a bulk of the nation's population (World Bank, 2021). One of the major causative factors of poor civic engagement in rural areas is inadequate education, and adult education programmes have been identified as one of the most viable remedies, since they equip adults with the knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful participation in economic, social, and political life (UNESCO, 2017).

Adult education is a transmission process of general, technical, or vocational knowledge, values, and attitudes, taking place outside the formal school system, with a view to remedying early educational inadequacies of mature people and equipping them with the cultural elements required for active participation in the social, economic, and political life of their societies (Kobani, 2018). Among the several programmes through which adult education pursues this mandate, civic education, adult literacy, and continuing education are three that bear directly on the extent to which rural dwellers are able to participate meaningfully in the civic life of their communities.

Civic education imparts and strengthens the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes that prepare citizens to participate in a democratic society. The National Democratic Institute (2024) describes civic education as a programme that strengthens individual knowledge of the structures and processes of democratic systems and the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and notes that, over time, its scope has expanded to build citizen power and foster civic engagement more broadly. Civic education helps individuals understand how governing systems work, recognise their rights and responsibilities, and engage peacefully in civic and political activities such as voting, advocacy, community service, and elected office, thereby contributing to an informed public that can hold government officials accountable (National Democratic Institute, 2024). Manuwa (2023), in a related study on civic education and political participation among Nigerian youths, similarly found that civic education fosters civic knowledge, active citizenship, and engagement in political activities beyond elections, such as joining civil society organisations and community-based initiatives. This aligns with Alikor and Okachiku-Agbaraeke (2025), who observed that education empowers individuals to actively participate in the community and society at large, and identified active citizenship and democracy among the outcomes of an education system that is productive and socially just.

Adult literacy, on the other hand, is widely recognised as a fundamental human right and a critical element of both individual and societal advancement. It plays a vital role in equipping learners with the knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful participation in economic, social, and political life, typically through instruction in reading, writing, numeracy, health education, vocational skills, and civic education (UNESCO, 2017). In developing countries such as Nigeria, where access to formal education is often constrained by socio-economic barriers, adult literacy programmes serve as a second chance for individuals to acquire essential life skills (Okediran, 2019). Empirical studies have demonstrated a strong association between adult literacy and improved civic and economic outcomes in rural areas: Egunyomi (2023) found that literacy programmes foster self-employment and reduce dependency, Akinpelu and Ajayi (2018) found that rural adult learners in Nigeria gained greater access to vocational skills and financial autonomy, while Okeke, Ibe, and Eze (2019) and Abiola and Lawal (2020) reported that adult literacy learners record improvements in health awareness and reduced disease incidence. Oladipo (2021) further observed that adult literacy imparts marketable skills and lowers vulnerability to exploitation, in line with the view that literacy is integral to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals, including poverty eradication and inclusive education (UNESCO, 2017). In a related vein, Taylor, Jack, and Wami (2023) identified civic literacy, alongside visual, environmental, health, and financial literacy, as a key area of adult education requiring sustained funding to equip adults for meaningful civic participation. Despite these benefits, adult literacy programmes in rural Nigeria continue to face challenges such as inadequate funding, insufficient instructional materials, and socio-cultural barriers (Aminu & Olayanju, 2020), which limit their impact in states such as Rivers State (Ironbar & Anam, 2024).

Continuing education is a further adult education programme that seeks to positively link the needs and aspirations of individuals with educational activities for the development of their potentialities and for the socio-economic and political development of the nation (Onyenemezu & Aduvo, 2024). It is designed principally to help beneficiaries make up for, or save, lost educational ground, particularly those who did not attend school at all or who dropped out for various reasons, as is commonly the case in rural Nigeria. Because it offers a wide range of remedial, developmental, and vocational learning opportunities to all categories of individuals irrespective of age, sex, or social affiliation, continuing education has been identified as one of the most effective means of enhancing civic engagement in under-served rural communities (Onyenemezu & Aduvo, 2024; Adekola, Taylor, & Wami, 2021). This is corroborated by Nwoye, Deekor, and Taylor (2021), who found that community mobilization strategies significantly enhance resource mobilization for community development programmes in rural communities, further underscoring the link between community-based educational engagement and civic participation in under-served areas.

It is against this background that the present study, drawn from a wider doctoral investigation into adult education programmes and civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State, examined the extent to which civic education, adult literacy, and continuing education programmes affect civic engagement among adult beneficiaries in rural areas of the state.

Statement of the Problem

In rural areas of Rivers State, recent evidence points to a low level of civic engagement, as reflected in high rates of poverty, poor standards of health and education, weak or non-existent participation in political activities, ignorance of governance structures and electoral procedures, and widespread mistrust in public institutions, notwithstanding the fact that rural areas constitute a bulk of the state's population. The question that arises is whether these indicators of civic disengagement could be reduced if people in rural communities of Rivers State were exposed to functional adult education programmes such as civic education, adult literacy education, and continuing education. While a growing body of literature has examined the general relationship between adult education and civic or political participation in Nigeria, comparatively little empirical attention has been paid specifically to how civic education, adult literacy, and continuing education programmes, taken individually, affect civic engagement among adult beneficiaries in the rural areas of Rivers State, and to whether male and female beneficiaries perceive their effects differently. It is against this gap that the present study was conducted.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of adult education programmes on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out the effect of civic education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State.
2. Ascertain the effect of adult literacy programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State.
3. Investigate the effect of continuing education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the effect of civic education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State?
2. What is the effect of adult literacy education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State?
3. What is the effect of continuing education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of adult male and female beneficiaries of adult education programmes in various adult learning centres on the effect of civic education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of adult male and female beneficiaries of adult education programmes in various adult learning centres on the effect of adult literacy education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of adult male and female beneficiaries of adult education programmes in various adult learning centres on the effect of continuing education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The area of the study was the rural areas of Rivers State, comprising the upland (mainland) and coastal (riverine) local government areas of the state. The population of the study comprised all adult male and female beneficiaries of adult education programmes in various adult education centres in rural communities of Rivers State, estimated at 712 people, made up of 251 males and 461 females. Given the manageable size of the population, all 712 beneficiaries were studied as a census, without further sampling.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Effect of Adult Education Programmes on Civic Engagement in Rural Areas of Rivers State Questionnaire" (IAEPCERARSQ), structured on a four-point scale of Strongly Agreed (4), Agreed (3), Disagreed (2), and Strongly Disagreed (1). The face and content validity of the instrument was established by the researcher's supervisor and two other experts in the Department of Adult Education and Community

Development, Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, whose observations were incorporated into the final version of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a test of internal consistency using the Cronbach Alpha method, with the alpha coefficients of the individual constructs all above the 0.70 threshold recommended by Nunnally, as cited in Ngoma and Ntale (2019), confirming that the instrument was reliable for the purposes of the study.

The researcher, assisted by two trained research assistants, administered 712 copies of the questionnaire to the entire population of beneficiaries, out of which 650 valid copies were retrieved and used for analysis, comprising 244 copies from male beneficiaries and 406 copies from female beneficiaries, representing a 91.3 percent retrieval rate. Data collected were analysed using mean, standard deviation, and z-test statistics. The three research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation, with item and grand means interpreted using the following boundary limits: 3.50-4.00 as Strongly Agreed (SA); 2.50-3.49 as Agreed (A); 1.50-2.49 as Disagreed (D); and 0.50-1.49 as Strongly Disagreed (SD). The three null hypotheses were tested using z-test statistics at the 0.05 level of significance; a null hypothesis was rejected where the calculated z-value exceeded the critical z-value, and retained (accepted) where the calculated value was less than the critical value.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the effect of civic education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Scores of Responses on the Effect of Civic Education Programme on Civic Engagement in Rural Areas of Rivers State

S/N	Items	Male Beneficiaries (N=244)			Female Beneficiaries (N=406)		
		Mean	SD	Rmk	Mean	SD	Rmk
1	Civic education develops knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes that prepare learners to participate in a democratic society and foster dignity for all.	3.45	0.61	Agree	3.43	0.62	Agree
2	Civic education imparts and strengthens individual knowledge of the structures and processes of democratic systems and the rights and responsibilities of citizens.	3.26	0.77	Agree	3.29	0.72	Agree
3	Civic education also helps individuals understand how governing systems work, recognize their rights and responsibilities, and develop an ability to engage peacefully in civic and political activities, such as voting, advocacy, community service, and elected office.	3.30	0.75	Agree	3.31	0.73	Agree
4	Civic education contributes to an informed public that can hold government officials accountable for their actions or inaction.	3.28	0.76	Agree	3.13	0.79	Agree
5	By cultivating democratic competencies, civic education centres citizens as power holders.	3.15	0.81	Agree	2.91	0.92	Agree
6	Civic education makes it possible for citizens to know their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society.	3.27	0.71	Agree	3.17	0.83	Agree
Grand Mean		3.29	0.76	Agree	3.12	0.82	Agree

Table 1 shows that all six items relating to civic education fell within the boundary limit of Agreed for both male and female beneficiaries. With a grand mean of 3.29 for male beneficiaries and 3.12 for female beneficiaries, it is evident that both groups agreed that civic education programme has a positive effect on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State, particularly with respect to developing democratic knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes among learners.

Research Question 2: What is the effect of adult literacy education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Scores of Responses on the Effect of Adult Literacy Education Programme on Civic Engagement in Rural Areas of Rivers State

S/N	Items	Male Beneficiaries (N=244)			Female Beneficiaries (N=406)		
		Mean	SD	Rmk	Mean	SD	Rmk
7	Adult literacy plays a vital role in equipping learners with the knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful participation in economic, social, and political life.	3.30	0.75	Agree	3.29	0.76	Agree
8	Adult literacy programmes serve as a second chance for many individuals to acquire essential life skills required to successfully live in their communities.	3.31	0.73	Agree	3.23	0.79	Agree
9	Adult literacy programmes arm the learners with reading, writing, numeracy, health education, vocational skills, and civic education.	3.26	0.77	Agree	3.23	0.79	Agree
10	Adult literacy programmes equip adults with knowledge and skills to contribute to increased productivity, enhanced health awareness, poverty reduction, and improved quality of life; thus playing a crucial role in the socio-economic development of rural areas.	3.13	0.79	Agree	3.11	0.81	Agree
11	Adult literacy programmes enhance the reduction of high rates of illiteracy, particularly in underserved rural areas.	3.01	0.89	Agree	2.94	0.98	Agree
12	Adult literacy enhances improved civic engagement and economic outcomes in rural areas.	3.45	0.62	Agree	3.41	0.65	Agree
Grand Mean		3.24		Agree	3.20		Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2026. Valid Sample Size for Analysis = 650.

Table 2 shows that all six items relating to adult literacy fell within the boundary limit of Agreed for both groups of respondents. With a grand mean of 3.24 for male beneficiaries and 3.20 for female beneficiaries, both male and female beneficiaries of adult education programmes agreed that adult literacy education programme has a positive effect on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State.

Research Question 3: What is the effect of continuing education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean Scores of Responses on the Effect of Continuing Education Programme on Civic Engagement in Rural Areas of Rivers State

S/N	Items	Male Beneficiaries (N=244)			Female Beneficiaries (N=406)		
		Mean	SD	Rmk	Mean	SD	Rmk
13	Continuing education positively links the needs and aspirations of individuals with educational activities, for the development of their potentialities and for the socio-economic and political development of a nation state.	3.68	0.58	Agree	3.74	0.54	Agree
14	Continuing education makes it possible for citizens to acquire education and re-education, training and re-training opportunities made available to people out-of-school whose education was interrupted prematurely, in order to cope with the prerequisite demands of society.	3.76	0.56	Agree	3.61	0.52	Agree
15	Continuing education makes it possible for learners who have some contact with the school system to build on the knowledge, skills, competencies, and ideas already acquired.	3.62	0.65	Agree	3.46	0.60	Agree
16	Continuing education is the provision of educational opportunities for all categories of individuals, irrespective of whatever failure was earlier recorded, thereby ensuring the continued relevance of individuals in society.	3.59	0.71	Agree	3.69	0.69	Agree
17	Continuing education serves as the best means or medium of enhancing civic engagement, irrespective of age, sex, or social affiliation.	3.57	0.76	Agree	3.65	0.77	Agree
18	Continuing education also serves as a remedial, developmental, or contemporary-issue-based programme for learners seeking self-improvement or increased professional capacity, skills, and competence.	3.65	0.77	Agree	3.41	0.65	Agree
Grand Mean		3.61		Agree	3.59		Agree

Table 3 shows that items 15 and 18 fell within the boundary limit of Agreed for female beneficiaries, while the remaining items for both male and female beneficiaries fell within the boundary limit of Strongly Agreed. With a grand mean of 3.61 for male beneficiaries and 3.59 for female beneficiaries, both groups strongly agreed that continuing education programme has a positive effect on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State, recording the highest grand means among the three programmes examined in this study.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of adult male and female beneficiaries on the effect of civic education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State.

Table 4: Z-test Analysis of Responses on the Effect of Civic Education Programme on Civic Engagement in Rural Areas of Rivers State

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male Beneficiaries	244	3.25	0.77	648	1.35	1.96	Not Significant (Accepted)
Female Beneficiaries	406	3.12	0.82				

Table 4 shows that the calculated z-value of 1.35 is less than the critical z-value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance with 648 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This means that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female beneficiaries of adult education programmes on the effect of civic education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of adult male and female beneficiaries on the effect of adult literacy education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State.

Table 5: Z-test Analysis of Responses on the Effect of Adult Literacy Education Programme on Civic Engagement in Rural Areas of Rivers State

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male Beneficiaries	244	3.24	0.76	648	1.54	1.96	Not Significant (Accepted)
Female Beneficiaries	406	3.20	0.79				

Table 5 shows that the calculated z-value of 1.54 is less than the critical z-value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance with 648 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted, indicating that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female beneficiaries on the effect of adult literacy education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of adult male and female beneficiaries on the effect of continuing education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State.

Table 6: Z-test Analysis of Responses on the Effect of Continuing Education Programme on Civic Engagement in Rural Areas of Rivers State

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male Beneficiaries	244	3.61	0.67	648	1.69	1.96	Not Significant (Accepted)
Female Beneficiaries	406	3.59	0.63				

Table 6 shows that the calculated z-value of 1.69 is less than the critical z-value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance with 648 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted, indicating that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female beneficiaries on the effect of continuing education programme on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The finding for research question one, corroborated by hypothesis one, indicated that civic education programme has a positive effect on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State, and that male and female beneficiaries do not differ significantly in this perception. Both groups agreed that civic education develops knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes that prepare learners for democratic participation, strengthens knowledge of democratic structures and citizens' rights and responsibilities, and contributes to an informed public capable of holding government officials accountable. This finding aligns with the National Democratic Institute (2024), which similarly describes civic education as a programme that develops democratic knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes, and that expands

over time to build citizen power and foster civic engagement. It is also consistent with Manuwa (2023), who found that civic education fosters civic knowledge, active citizenship, and participation in political activities beyond voting, such as membership in civil society organisations and community-based initiatives, among Nigerian youths. This is further reinforced by Okachiku-Agbaraeke and Alikor (2025), who identified bad governance, corruption, unemployment, and poverty as drivers of youth restiveness in Nigeria, and recommended functional education as a strategy for repositioning youths as active, responsible citizens.

The finding for research question two, corroborated by hypothesis two, revealed that adult literacy programme has a positive effect on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State, with no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female beneficiaries. Both groups agreed that adult literacy equips learners with reading, writing, numeracy, health, vocational, and civic knowledge and skills, and that it enhances civic engagement and economic outcomes in rural areas. This is consistent with UNESCO (2017), which identifies adult literacy as central to equipping learners for meaningful participation in economic, social, and political life, and with Egunyomi (2023), who found that literacy programmes foster self-employment and reduce dependency in rural communities. The finding also aligns with Okeke, Ibe, and Eze (2019) and Abiola and Lawal (2020), who reported that adult literacy learners record improvements in health awareness, and with Oladipo (2021), who observed that adult literacy imparts marketable skills and lowers vulnerability to exploitation. Given that adult literacy programmes in rural Nigeria continue to face challenges such as inadequate funding and instructional materials (Aminu & Olayanju, 2020; Ironbar & Anam, 2024), sustained investment will be required to consolidate these gains in Rivers State. This is in line with Nwuke (2025), who found that robust administrative strategies, including inclusive stakeholder communication and collaboration, are essential for sustaining functional programmes and a harmonious operating environment in public institutions in Rivers State.

The finding for research question three, corroborated by hypothesis three, showed that continuing education programme has a strong positive effect on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State, recording the highest grand means among the three programmes examined, with no significant difference between male and female beneficiaries. Both groups strongly agreed that continuing education positively links the needs and aspirations of individuals with educational activities for socio-economic and political development, provides a second opportunity for those whose education was interrupted, and serves as the best means of enhancing civic engagement irrespective of age, sex, or social affiliation. This finding is consistent with Onyenemezu and Aduvo (2024), who affirmed the utilisation of adult continuing education programmes for sustainable national development, and with Adekola, Taylor, and Wami (2021), who highlighted the value of community-based education strategies in rural Rivers State. It similarly aligns with Nwanguma and Nwuke (2024), who found that school-based management committees, as local-level bodies bridging schools and the communities they serve, enhance governance and community participation in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The comparatively higher ratings recorded for continuing education, relative to civic education and adult literacy, suggest that rural beneficiaries place particular value on the flexible, remedial, and developmental character of continuing education programmes, which accommodate learners with varying levels of prior contact with the formal school system.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that civic education, adult literacy, and continuing education programmes each have a positive effect on civic engagement in rural areas of Rivers State, with continuing education recording the highest level of perceived effect, followed by civic education and adult literacy. The absence of a significant difference between the mean responses of male and female beneficiaries on all three programmes indicates a shared recognition, across gender lines, of the value of these adult education programmes for civic engagement. This affirms the value of a diversified, multi-programme approach to adult education, rather than reliance on any single programme, in strengthening civic engagement in the rural communities of Rivers State.

Recommendations

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

1. State and local governments and stakeholders of adult education in Rivers State should ensure that civic education programmes are regularly conducted in rural areas of the state, to provide the literacy and awareness required to enhance civic engagement and eradicate civic disengagement in the areas of politics, governance, and civic responsibilities.

2. The Rivers State Ministry of Education should ensure that functional adult literacy programmes are directed towards rural adults who cannot read, write, or compute, so that their capacity for effective civic engagement in their communities is enhanced and empowered.

3. The Rivers State Agency for Adult and Non-formal Education should ensure that continuing education is offered as one of the subjects or courses in adult education centres in rural areas of the state, so as to provide a second opportunity for citizens whose education was interrupted prematurely to acquire the education, re-education, training, and re-training required to cope with the demands of society.

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