Effect of National Education Association of Liberia's Literacy Programme on Women's Reading, Writing, Numeracy, Health and Sanitation Skills in Jorquelleh District, Liberia

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Abstract: Illiteracy is a major contributing factor to women's marginalization the world over. Whereas literacy is a key factor by which many women are empowered, the national literacy rate for women in rural areas in Liberia is at a shocking 26%. Therefore, the study was undertaken to evaluate the effects of the National Adult Education Association of Liberia's (NEAEL) adult literacy programme on women's reading, reading, numeracy, health and sanitation skills in Jorquelleh District, Bong County, in Liberia. The study employed the Capability Approach and a quantitative design with ex-post facto research method. The target population included level-one female adult literacy participants of the National Education Association of Liberia's adult literacy programme located in Jorquelleh District, Bong County, in Liberia. The sample size was 110 respondents, 55 adults literacy level-one female participants and 55 non-participants. Simple random sampling was used to select the adult literacy programme participants and purposeful sampling for non-participants. A questionnaire was employed to collect primary data. The study results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between leaners and non-learners on the effect of NAEAL literacy programme on women's health and sanitation skills (F= 6.878, p=0.001). The study concluded that the NAEAL literacy programme had significant effects on the reading, writing and numeracy skills and enhanced their health and sanitation skills. Therefore, it was recommended that the government of Liberia should urgently mobilize for support to adult literacy and life-long for women and other disadvantaged groups to avoid reinforcing the 'second-class' status of women and other disadvantaged people within its pro-poor policy.

Keywords: National Education Association, Liberia, Literacy Programme, Women, Reading, Writing, Numeracy, Health, Sanitation Skills, Jorquelleh, Liberia

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I. Introduction

Literacy empowers and it is the most important means by which women can be empowered socially, politically and economically. The study examined literacy and women empowerment and discussed how adult literacy education helped in the empowerment of women in Jorquelleh District, Bong County, in Liberia. It highlighted how the NAEAL literacy programme empowers rural women in the acquisition of literacy skills, political awareness. Studies showed that adult literacy is a key empowerment tool for both men women.

Omolewa¹ (2008) observes the fight against adult illiteracy is not limited to Africa. Not long ago, the countries of Europe also had a largely illiterate population. Appertaining to fight against illiteracy in Africa, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, former president of Tanzania and Paulo Freire, a Brazilian philosopher and educator, were recognized in many parts of the world, especially among Third World countries, for their as having made a significant contribution to the mass education of the people. Under the leadership of Mwalimu Nyerere, Tanzania's mass adult literacy programme enhanced the literacy rate to the highest in Africa, at about 85%. Freire, on the other hand, in addition to his work among the poor in Brazil, had contact with liberation movements across Africa. These included Tanzania, Guinea Bissau, Zimbabwe and others². Donaldo Macedo, in his introduction to Freire's book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, mentions that learners who follow Freire's methodology of REFLECT to learn how to read and write, gain new awareness of selfhood and started doing critical analysis of the social situation in which they find themselves. They thereby acted to transform the society that denied them the opportunity of participation³.

Immediately after the independence of Kenya in 1963, the leaders recognized the need to achieve adult literacy to promote self-esteem and instill appropriate behavior. Literacy, health, and nutrition, family life, agriculture, environmental studies, and civics were the main subject of that adult education⁴. They also noted

that Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) programmes in Kenya can be traced to the arrival of Arab traders, European missionaries, and explorers as well as the colonial officials in the late nineteenth Century.

Kammah⁵ defines women's empowerment as the process through which women evaluate and expand whatever is conceivable for them to be and do in circumstances where they are restricted, compared to men, from being and doing. Women empowerment is also considered a process that enables women to renegotiate gender roles to increase their possibilities for being and doing. According to Cox and Robinson-Pant⁶, in 1948, UNESCO defined a person to be literate if they can read and write, with understanding, a short simple statement on their everyday life; in 1978, UNESCO updated the definition stating that a person is functionally literate, if one can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of their group and community, and also for enabling them to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for their own and the community's development. She adds that UNESCO modified the meaning of literacy in 2005, to be "the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts". Literacy, therefore, involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve her or his goals, develop her or his knowledge and potential, and participate fully in the community and wider society.

Omolewa¹ cites Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to emphasize the right to free education at the fundamental stages for all. She states further that because of this declaration, progress has been made in the fight against adult illiteracy, especially for women. She attributes the success made in this direction to mass literacy initiatives and mass school enrolment. According to Omolewa, the former Soviet Union, Cuba and China provide good and recent examples of countries where a commitment to the eradication of illiteracy has yielded emulating results. Ebirim⁷ emphasizes that women's role in the development of any society is indispensable at all levels. However, women can effectively exercise this role when they are fully and equally empowered through literacy like their male counterparts. Swain and Wallentin⁸ argue that women empowerment can only take place when they challenge the existing norms and culture, of their community to improve their own well-being.

The government of Liberia is, therefore, committed and considers the provision of Basic Adult Education as one of its basic obligations under the overall umbrella that education is a fundamental human right and basic tool for sustainable development. The Alternative Basic Education (ABE), a reformed, restructured and renamed department of Ministry of Education, aims to develop the entire educational potential of all individuals outside the formal school system. ABE focuses on illiterates fifteen (15) years old and above as the target. It covers all organized activities at all levels, the basic literacy and post-literacy levels, apprenticeship, or on-the-job training, extension services, vocational courses and youth training group⁹.

The programme is run from six sources: The Ministry of Education, other government ministries and agencies that oversee adult education and literacy as necessary component of their development program; religious organizations for evangelical outreach; some of the large concession companies for their own workers, both to upgrade their performance and fringe benefit of employment; voluntary non-governmental organizations; private individuals and community groups that feel the need to help their community members and the citizens at large to improve their standard of living, and indigenous language associations for the promotion of learning to read and write in these languages to preserve their various languages and culture.

This study investigated how adult literacy learning influenced women empowerment in Liberia. The researcher sought to contribute to enriching the country's effort of promoting universal access to basic education and gender empowerment as well the fostering of effective post-conflict reconstruction, peace, and development. It investigated the Literacy programme of the National Adult Education Association of Liberia (NAEAL), National Literacy Programme that was launched 2011. The Adult Literacy Programme was the focus of this study because it is said to be aimed at enabling learners to acquire and sustain functional skills, knowledge, attitudes and values. It uses Learners' Workbook and Facilitators' Manual to facilitate adult learning at the community level. These materials use a learning approach which is the combination of Freirean Literacy through empowering community techniques (REFLECT) and other cultural friendly participatory adult learning methodologies.

REFLECT is an innovative approach to adult learning and social change, which fuses on the theories of Paulo Freire with the methodologies of participatory rural appraisal. The core components of NAEAL National Adult Literacy Program include community awareness and mobilization, Community Literacy Programme Management Committees, Community Literacy Program Management Committees Trainings, Community Literacy Facilitators' Trainings, Learning Materials support and support to learning and monitoring of learning activities. Financial support was given by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs via the Finnish Refugee Council¹⁰. The study assessed the effects of NAEAL's literacy programme on women's empowerment by doing an ex post facto study to compare the level of empowerment of a sample of 55 level one female programme participants and the level of empowerment of 55 non-participants to establish from Jorquelleh District.

Adult Literacy and Women's Health and Sanitation Practices

Robinson-Pant¹¹ has studied the relationship between literacy and health, which has been the attention of numerous research and policy discussions. She established that people with low literacy competency in the United States were found to be at the risk of adverse health outcome at the ratio 1.5 to 3 compared with those who read at higher levels. Positive health outcomes, including the adoption of family planning, improved nutrition, and sanitation are associated with literate women in low-income countries. She reports that 50% of child deaths that were avoided between 1970 and 2009 was due to increase in women's levels of education. Moreover, on an average 23%, a literate woman is likely to seek support from a midwife, whereas and educated mothers would to their children directly to the medical centre or hospital to ensure their children are treated or vaccinated. Robinson-Pant said that other studies showed that healthy adults are less dependent on their daughters' labor, thereby releasing them to attend school.

Robinson-Pant¹¹ also suggests the consideration of broader issues on practical gender needs based on empowerment and health could be tackled with literacy interventions that respond to women's (or men's) strategic gender needs. The wide range of actions proposed within SDG 5 (including legislative change, supporting women's leadership, tackling gender violence and harmful practices) could be addressed through this broader approach to women's empowerment in the framework of literacy programs. In that paper, she called for serious methodologies to literacy and health promotion, with a far-reaching view of literacy that is rooted in socio-cultural practices that highlight concerns of power, personality, and voice in relation to health and women's empowerment, instead of regarding literacy only in functional terms.

Zimmerman¹² has examined female literacy and access to information in Asia, with a special focus on maternal health impacts. The purpose of the research was to explore the gaps in literacy rates of women in developing areas of Asia. These gaps were then correlated with aspects of women's literacy that affected their reproductive health. Zimmerman observes that access to economic progress and social well-being remain unequal, especially when the lives of women who live in the developed regions are compared to those in developing regions of the world. She also notes that those women in developing regions remain excluded from the benefits that accompany economic progress and social well-being. From the findings of her research, the author concludes that there is a significant correlation between female literacy and better health outcomes for mothers and children. The findings also indicated that on the overall literate women are less likely to die as a result of pregnancy or childbirth complications. Similarly, children born to such women have increased chances of surviving delivery and passing the first five years of their lives. This effect was reported to be consistent with both women who were formally educated and those who are simply literate.

Kingah¹³ has also studied literacy development and its impact, with a case of the *mbororo* women in Cameroon. The work employed a mixed methods approach. Her report revealed that women could read Fulfulde pamphlets on how to treat diseases like cholera, diarrhoea and how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. She also found that the literacy programme participants followed their children's vaccination regimens, read pamphlets on how to purify water and birth control methods. As such, Kingah regards literacy as a process of the strengthening awareness, whereby being able to read a text on the dangers of sexually transmissible diseases could appeal to the women's consciences. The report envisaged that knowing how to read is highly likely to equip women with better family planning methods and awareness of the dangers of having too many children that they may not be able to feed.

Acharya *et al.*¹⁴ carried out a qualitative and quantitative research to assess the impact of a community development project launched in a remote hill district of Nepal. Their focus was on two project components: functional literacy programme, which had practical extensions in a post-literacy period, and group savings and credit programmes. The study reported that the Adult Literacy Programme had made more than 3,500 adults literate through 170 basic-literacy classes and 168 post-literacy classes. Both classes were conducted for six months per year. A total of 157 post-literacy classes formed self-help groups launched for savings and credit groups and kitchen gardening activities. They reported that the drop-out rate in the basic literacy classes was low, especially for post post-literacy classes that were lower than in basic literacy classes. The study also reported that literacy education contributed to a reduction in the gender gap in the three programmes. The average gender gap in the literacy rate was approximately 30% before the programme. It reportedly dropped to about 23% after the programme. The study further identified self-help group programme and kitchen gardening as other functional impacts of the adult literacy programme.

Acharya *et al.*¹⁴ also found that the programme participants valued the post-literacy classes on sanitation, immunization of children, rehydration therapy and family planning. They also gained knowledge and became specifically familiar with immunization against tetanus, diphtheria, plutosis, measles and various malnutrition problems. The study also revealed that the adult literacy programme and its follow-up programmes seemed to have influenced improvement awareness about the use of Jeevan Jal (rehydration solution) in diarrhoea, green vegetable intake, safe drinking water, and the protection of food from dust, flies and insects. It was also estimated that about one-third of the programme participants recorded their daily income and expenditures.

Statement of the Problem

Empowerment of women entails expanding their assets and capabilities to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable the institutions that affect their lives. It consists in manifold meanings that relate to power, participation, capability, autonomy, choice and freedom. Compared to the status of other African women during pre-colonial and other eras in history, the disempowerment that reportedly affected women in other African countries occurred to a lower degree in Liberia. In Liberia, female power in local and public realms was traditionally featured among the habitats before the introduction of western forms of governance. History also shows that traditional women in Liberia regarded men and women as being different physically, yet complementary to the female counterparts¹⁵.

A joint report by the Liberian Government and the United Nations on women empowerment in Liberia indicates that discrimination and inequality against women exist in the legal systems and administrative structures of the state¹⁷. This marginalization is perpetuated through a strong urban-rural inequity in terms of literacy and empowerment. The urban dwellers (women) have more access to educational opportunities compared to those in rural areas. Literacy is low among rural women in Liberia at 32.8%¹⁷. According to Sieh¹⁸, the former female president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, listed low level of education among women as a major reason for female marginalization in Liberia. These mixed views, therefore, necessitated the study which sought to find concrete empirical evidence and contribute to existing debates on women empowerment in Liberia.

II. Materials and Methods

Study Design: This study adopted a quantitative approach using ex post facto method.

Study Location: The research assessed the effects of the National Adult Education Association of Liberia's (NAEAL) literacy programme on women empowerment in Jorquelleh District, Bong County in Liberia.

Study Population: The target population of the study was 1650 NAEAL adult literacy programme female learners

Sample Size: The respondents were sampled from 45 study circles in 44 adult literacy programme communities in Jorquelleh District, Bong County in Liberia¹⁹.

Sample Size Calculation: A sample size of 110 respondents was used in the study. It comprised 55 level 1 female participants of the NAEAL adult literacy programme and 55 female adult non-participants from 44 adult literacy programme communities in Jorquelleh District. The non-participants were female adults in the same community with NAEAL programme participants in Jorquelleh District who either enrolled but did not attend study circle meetings or those non-literate females in the community who decided not to take part in the literacy programme or could not participate because of lack of space. Simple random sampling was applied to identify specific programme beneficiaries, whereas purposive sampling was applied to enlist nonparticipants of the literacy that were involved in the study. The sample sizes were derived from Krejcie and Morgan table which was projected based on a p-value of 0.05^{22} .

Procedure Methodology: The study used researcher administered questionnaire to collect primary data. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on ideas from FRC and NAEAL study Circle Assessment and Learner Evaluation tool and the 2015 report of Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines for Women's Economic Empowerment Programmes of the United Nations Foundation and ExxonMobil Foundation ^{20,21}.

Data Analysis: After the collection and compilation of the questionnaires, the data was categorized, coded, tabulated and analyzed with the use of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). ANOVA was used to compare the responses of the NAEAL Literacy participants and nonparticipants. The statistical significance of the findings was set at P<0.05 to ensure an acceptable level accuracy.

III. Results and Discussion

The study sought the learners' and non-learners' responses on the effect of National Adult Education Association of Liberia's (NAEAL) literacy programme on women empowerment in Jorquelleh District, Bong County, in Liberia. To this end, the respondents were asked to indicate the effect of NAEAL literacy programme on women's reading, writing and numeracy skills. The findings were as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Effects of NAEAL Literacy Programme on Women's Reading, Writing and Numeracy Skills

Empowerment indicators	N	Mean/ L	Mean/NL	Std Dev L	Std Dev /NL	F value	P value
Identify and name objects	110	2.87	1.78	0.34	0.42	228.17	0.00
Writing of name objects	110	2.91	0.35	1.04	0.27	993.84	0.00
Reading sentences	110	2.91	1.04	0.50	0.00	480.29	0.00
Writing sentences	110	1.51	1.00	0.50	0.00	56.00	0.00
Reads about	110	1.53	1.00	0.50	0.00	60.23	0.00
Writes about	110	1.51	1.00	50452.00	0.00	56.00	0.00
Multiplication and subtraction	110	3.00	1.49	0.50	0.07	492.07	0.00
Addition and subtraction	110	2.69	1.11	0.63	0.42	239.02	0.00
Multiplication and addition	110	2.75	1.25	0.58	0.44	228.65	0.00

Division	110	2.87	1.35	0.34	0.48	373.55	0.00
Voting during elections	110	2.40	2.11	0.53	0.63	6.88	0.00

The study results indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between leaners and non-learners on the effect of National Adult Education Association of Liberia's (NAEAL) literacy programme on women empowerment in Jorquelleh District, Bong County in Liberia (p=0.000). This showed that the NAEAL programmes were effective in providing the necessary skills and knowledge to community dwellers to help them fend for themselves. It further disclosed that the organization has trained more literacy facilitators and learners across the country. As a result, the beneficiaries have gained self-esteem and additional skills in writing as well as working and improving their communication skills.

NAEAL's aim is to empower people through education, literacy, business and life skills as well as professional development skills in order to sustain community development. Its main programmes include adult literacy, training for capacity building, literacy and educational resources development and professional development.

Table 2: Effect of NEAEL Literacy Programme on Women's Reading, Writing and Numeracy Skills

NEAEL and women's reading, writing and numeracy skills								
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.			
Between Groups	62.627	1	62.627	492.071	0.000			
Within Groups	13.745	108	0.127					
Total	76.373	109						

The ANOVA results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between leaners and non-learners on the effect of National Adult Education Association of Liberia's (NAEAL) literacy programme on women empowerment (F= 492.07, p=0.000).

The study also examined the effect of National Education Association of Liberia's literacy programme on women's health and sanitation skills in Jorquelleh District, Liberia. Table 3 below shows the effects of NAEAL's literacy programme on women's health and sanitation skills.

Table 3: Effects of NAEAL's Literacy Programme on Women's Health and Sanitation Skills

Empowerment indicators	N	Mean/	Mean/NL	Std Dev	Std Dev	F value	P value
		L		L	/NL		
When doctor gives me medicine, I will take	110	2.64	1.58	0.50	0.00	60.23	0.000
It is a must that I wash my hands before	110	3.00	1051.00	50352.00	0.00	56.00	0.000
It is necessary that I wash my hands after	110	2.64	1.38	0.50	0.07	382.05	0.000
When I or my family member is sick, I will go	110	3.00	1.11	0.63	0.32	238.02	0.000
to/take them to							
If anybody's sickness shows signs of Ebola in	110	2.54	1.25	0.58	0.34	228.65	0.000
my community, I must							
Beside Ebola, name one sickness that does not	110	2.85	1.34	0.34	0.36	353.55	0.000
have a cure							
What must someone do to avoid HIV/AIDS?	110	1.051	2.11	0.53	0.63	6.86	0.000

The study results revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between leaners and non-learners on the effect of National Adult Education Association of Liberia's (NAEAL) literacy programme on women's health and sanitation skills (p=0.000). This implied that NAEAL's learners who participated in the survey demonstrated a higher level empowerment compared to non-learners who participated in the survey. To provide an incentive for attendance, NAEAL encourages women participation by working with the health programmes and clinics in the region. It also provides women with information and literature on improving the health of their families as well as engaging safe child bearing practices. NAEAL provide lessons on hygiene, and childcare during the literacy classes.

Table 4: Significant Difference on Effects of NAEAL's Literacy Programme on Women's Health and Sanitation Skills

Sumution Skins									
ANOVA									
NAEAL's literacy programme on women's health and sanitation skills									
	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.					
Between Groups	2.327	1	2.327	6.878	0.01				
Within Groups	36.545	108	0.338						
Total	38.873	109							

The ANOVA results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between leaners and non-learners on the effects of NAEAL's literacy programme on women's health and sanitation skills (F= 6.878, p=0.001).

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study found an encouraging range of good practices in adult literacy programmes in Liberia. However, most practitioners like NAEAL and Government's Alternative Basic Education Division are constrained in terms of scope and sustainability because of a lack of adequate resources. Evidently, the importance of literacy to sustainable development and empowerment of women needs to be recognized explicitly within the government of Liberia's Pro-Poor agenda. The first step in this direction is the recognition of the importance of adult education and lifelong learning in all sustainable development programmes. Similarly, the government of Liberia urgently needs to mobilize support for adult literacy and lifelong learning for women and other disadvantaged people. If this is not done, women and other disadvantaged people will remain longer as 'second-class' citizens of the country.

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