

EDUCATIONAL PLANNING FOR LIFELONG LEARNING IN ADULT EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This study investigated educational planning for lifelong learning in adult education and sustainable community development. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Three research questions guided the study. The population of the study comprised 186 adult education facilitators involved in community-based adult learning programmes in Enugu State. Since the population size was relatively small and manageable, the entire population was used for the study; hence, no sampling was carried out. This census approach was adopted to ensure complete coverage of respondents and to enhance the accuracy and reliability of the findings. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled *Educational Planning for Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Community Development Questionnaire (EPLLSCDQ)*. The instrument was validated by three experts from the Department of Continuing Education and Development Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, to ensure content and face validity. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study. Data were collected through direct administration of the questionnaire to the respondents. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data, with a decision rule of 2.50 and above the acceptance benchmark. The findings of the study revealed that educational planning enhances lifelong learning opportunities among adult learners through improved access to adult education programmes, effective organisation of learning activities, provision of instructional materials, improved instructional delivery, increased learner participation, coordination of facilitators, and sustained continuity of programmes. The study also found that educational planning improves participation of adult learners in adult education programmes through enhanced accessibility, mobilisation, structured scheduling, resource availability, and reduced barriers to participation. Furthermore, the study revealed that educational planning contributes to sustainable community development by promoting vocational skill acquisition, self-reliance, employment opportunities, entrepreneurship development, poverty reduction, and improved living standards. Based on the findings, it was recommended that government and educational administrators should strengthen educational planning frameworks to enhance lifelong learning opportunities, improve learner participation, and promote sustainable community development through adult education programmes.

Keywords: Educational planning, lifelong learning, adult education, sustainable community development, community empowerment.

Introduction

The growing concern over the effectiveness of educational planning in promoting lifelong learning and sustainable community development has continued to attract the attention of scholars, policymakers, and educational administrators across the world. In many developing countries, particularly Nigeria, inadequate educational planning has remained a major challenge affecting the implementation of adult education programmes

designed to equip individuals with relevant knowledge, vocational competencies, entrepreneurial skills, and social values required for productive living and community transformation. The rapid changes in technology, economy, globalization, and labour market demands have made lifelong learning increasingly necessary for adults who seek to remain relevant and productive in society. Despite the importance of adult education in promoting literacy, self-reliance, poverty reduction, and community empowerment, many adult learners still experience limited access to quality learning opportunities due to poor programme planning, inadequate funding, shortage of instructional facilities, and weak implementation strategies. Consequently, several communities continue to face unemployment, illiteracy, low productivity, and underdevelopment, thereby raising concern about the extent to which educational planning can enhance lifelong learning and sustainable community development through adult education programmes.

Educational planning has remained an essential aspect of educational administration because it provides the framework through which educational goals and objectives are systematically achieved. Educational planning involves the identification of educational needs, formulation of policies, allocation of resources, implementation of programmes, and evaluation of educational outcomes for effective development. According to Ojedele (2021), educational planning referred to a systematic process of organizing educational activities and resources to achieve predetermined educational objectives effectively and efficiently. Similarly, Ololube (2020) explained that educational planning involved strategic decision-making processes aimed at improving educational quality, accessibility, and sustainability within society. In the context of this study, educational planning referred to the systematic organization and implementation of adult education programmes aimed at promoting lifelong learning and sustainable community development. Effective educational planning therefore remained necessary for ensuring that adult learners acquire relevant knowledge and skills capable of improving their socio-economic conditions and enhancing community development.

Lifelong learning has become a global educational priority because learning is no longer viewed as an activity restricted to formal schooling alone but as a continuous process that occurs throughout life. Lifelong learning enables individuals to continuously acquire knowledge, competencies, values, and attitudes needed for personal development, employability, social participation, and national growth. UNESCO (2022) described lifelong learning as a continuous learning process that empowers individuals to develop their capacities and adapt to changing social, economic, and technological environments throughout life. In another perspective, Merriam (2020) viewed lifelong learning as an ongoing educational experience through which individuals improve their knowledge and competencies in formal, non-formal, and informal learning settings. From the perspective of this study, lifelong learning refers to continuous educational opportunities provided to adults through organized adult education programmes for personal growth and sustainable community advancement. Lifelong learning remained closely linked to adult education because adult education programmes creates opportunities for adults to continuously develop skills and competencies necessary for productive participation in society.

Adult education has continued to serve as an important instrument for social transformation, economic empowerment, and human capacity development across nations. Adult education provides educational opportunities for adults who seek to improve their literacy level, vocational skills, entrepreneurial abilities, and civic awareness. According to Egeten (2021), adult education refers to organized learning activities designed to assist adults in developing knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies for personal and

societal development. In another definition, Bhola (2020) stated that adult education involved structured educational programmes aimed at improving adults' intellectual, vocational, and social capacities for effective community participation. Within the present study, adult education refers to organized educational programmes provided for adults to enhance lifelong learning, self-reliance, and sustainable community development. Adult education therefore remains a major platform for implementing lifelong learning initiatives because it provides adults with opportunities to acquire relevant competencies necessary for employment generation, poverty reduction, and community transformation.

Sustainable community development has become increasingly important in contemporary society because communities require educated, skilled, and empowered citizens for continuous social and economic progress. Sustainable community development focuses on improving the quality of life of individuals while ensuring long-term economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social stability. According to United Nations Development Programme (2021), sustainable community development refers to a process of improving the social, economic, environmental, and institutional conditions of communities in ways that meet present needs without compromising future generations. Similarly, Soubotina (2020) explained that community development involved empowering individuals and groups to actively participate in activities that improves their living standards and overall community welfare. In relation to this study, sustainable community development refers to the continuous improvement of community welfare through effective adult education and lifelong learning programmes capable of empowering individuals with relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies for productive living. Sustainable community development, therefore, depends significantly on effective educational planning capable of ensuring the successful implementation of lifelong learning programmes within communities.

Several empirical studies have highlighted the importance of educational planning, lifelong learning, adult education, and sustainable community development in promoting societal advancement. Akinpelu (2022) conducted a study on educational planning and adult learning participation in South-West Nigeria and found that effective educational planning improved adult learners' participation in vocational and literacy programmes. The study further revealed that properly planned adult education programmes enhanced skill acquisition and self-employment opportunities among adult learners. Similarly, Nwafor (2023) investigated lifelong learning and community empowerment in South-East Nigeria and reported that lifelong learning programmes contributed significantly to poverty reduction, self-reliance, and socio-economic empowerment among rural dwellers. In another study, Ogunode (2021) examined educational planning and sustainable development in Nigerian adult education programmes and discovered that effective planning improved programme implementation, community participation, and sustainable socio-economic development. Furthermore, Adebisi (2022) found that adult education programmes enhanced community participation and promoted sustainable development through entrepreneurial skill acquisition and empowerment initiatives. These empirical findings demonstrated that educational planning and lifelong learning remained essential factors in promoting sustainable community development through adult education programmes.

Notwithstanding the contributions of previous studies, observations from the researcher and empirical evidence reviewed revealed that many adult education programmes in Enugu State still face challenges such as inadequate planning, poor funding, shortage of qualified facilitators, insufficient instructional materials, and weak

implementation strategies. Many adult learners continue to experience difficulties in accessing quality lifelong learning opportunities capable of equipping them with relevant skills for self-reliance and sustainable living. Although previous studies examined educational planning, lifelong learning, adult education, and sustainable development separately, there appeared to be limited studies that comprehensively investigated educational planning for lifelong learning in adult education and sustainable community development in Enugu State, Nigeria. From the researcher's observations and reviewed literature, no known study had comprehensively addressed these variables together within the study area. This therefore created a gap in knowledge which the present study intended to fill. The study therefore intended to investigate educational planning for lifelong learning in adult education and sustainable community development in Enugu State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine how effective educational planning enhanced lifelong learning opportunities among adult learners and how educational planning promoted sustainable community development through adult education programmes.

Statement of the Problem

Educational planning remains a critical foundation for the effective implementation of lifelong learning programmes in adult education and for achieving sustainable community development in any society. When properly structured, educational planning is expected to ensure that adult education systems operate efficiently, inclusively, and in a manner that guarantees continuous access to learning opportunities for all adult learners. In an ideal situation, educational planning provides a clear framework for identifying learning needs, allocating adequate resources, training facilitators, and ensuring the availability of relevant instructional materials that support lifelong learning. Under such conditions, adult education programmes are expected to function optimally, enabling adults to acquire literacy, vocational, entrepreneurial, and life skills that empower them to contribute meaningfully to community development and national growth. Consequently, sustainable community development is enhanced through improved productivity, reduced poverty levels, increased self-reliance, and active civic participation among adult learners. However, the reality in many communities reveals a significant deviation from this ideal situation. In practice, educational planning for adult education programmes is often characterized by inadequate coordination, insufficient funding, poor implementation strategies, and lack of consistent policy support. Many adult education centres operate with limited instructional materials, untrained or underqualified facilitators, and irregular programme structures that fail to meet the learning needs of adult participants. As a result, lifelong learning opportunities remain inaccessible or ineffective for a large proportion of adult learners. This has continued to hinder the acquisition of relevant skills and competencies necessary for improving livelihoods and promoting sustainable community development. Furthermore, the weak state of educational planning has contributed to low participation rates in adult education programmes, poor learner engagement, and limited impact of adult education on socio-economic development within communities. The problem of this study therefore is that despite the recognized importance of educational planning in enhancing lifelong learning and promoting sustainable community development, adult education programmes in Enugu State appear to be poorly planned and ineffectively implemented, thereby limiting adult learners' access to meaningful lifelong learning opportunities and reducing the overall contribution of adult education to sustainable community development.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate educational planning for lifelong learning in adult education and sustainable community development.

Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. examine the extent to which educational planning enhances lifelong learning opportunities among adult learners.
2. determine how educational planning improves participation of adult learners in adult education programmes.
3. ascertain the extent to which educational planning contributes to sustainable community development through adult education programmes.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does educational planning enhance lifelong learning opportunities among adult learners?
2. How does educational planning improve participation of adult learners in adult education programmes?
3. In what ways does educational planning contribute to sustainable community development through adult education programmes?

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The area of the study was Enugu State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 186 adult education facilitators involved in community-based adult learning programmes in Enugu State. Since the population size was relatively small and manageable, the entire population was used for the study; hence, no sampling technique was adopted. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled Educational Planning for Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Community Development Questionnaire (EPLLSCDQ). The instrument was developed based on the objectives of the study and was used to obtain responses from the respondents. The instrument was validated by three experts from the Department of Continuing Education and Development Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, to ensure face and content validity.

The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study. Data were collected through direct administration of the questionnaire to the respondents with the assistance of trained research assistants to ensure proper completion and return of the instrument. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. For Research Question 1, which sought to determine the extent to which educational planning enhances lifelong learning opportunities among adult learners, mean scores were interpreted using the following real limits: 3.50–4.00 = Very High Extent; 2.50–3.49 = High Extent; 1.50–2.49 = Low Extent; and 1.00–1.49 = Very Low Extent. For Research Questions 2 and 3, which sought respondents' opinions on issues relating to educational planning and sustainable community development, a criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted. Any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was regarded as Agreed (A), while any item with a mean score below 2.50 was regarded as Disagreed (D). The standard deviation values were used to determine the degree of dispersion or homogeneity in the respondents' responses.

Results**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the Extent to which Educational Planning Enhances Lifelong Learning Opportunities among Adult Learners**

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD	Decision
1	Educational planning improves access to lifelong learning opportunities for adult learners	3.42	0.74	High Extent
2	Educational planning enhances the organisation of adult education programmes for continuous learning	3.38	0.71	High Extent
3	Educational planning ensures the availability of instructional materials for adult education programmes	3.31	0.76	High Extent
4	Educational planning improves the effectiveness of instructional delivery in adult education programmes	3.45	0.69	High Extent
5	Educational planning increases adult learners' participation in learning activities	3.36	0.73	High Extent
6	Educational planning improves coordination of facilitators in adult education programmes	3.29	0.77	High Extent
7	Educational planning supports continuity and sustainability of lifelong learning programmes	3.48	0.68	High Extent
		3.38	0.73	High Extent
Aggregate Score				

Decision Rule: 3.50–4.00 = Very High Extent; 2.50–3.49 = High Extent; 1.50–2.49 = Low Extent; 1.00–1.49 = Very Low Extent.

Data presented in Table 1 show that the item mean scores ranged from $\bar{X} = 3.29$ to $\bar{X} = 3.48$, indicating that respondents perceived educational planning as enhancing lifelong learning opportunities among adult learners to a high extent. The aggregate mean score ($\bar{X} = 3.38$) and standard deviation ($SD = 0.73$) indicate that educational planning enhances lifelong learning opportunities among adult learners to a high extent, with relatively little variation in respondents' opinions. This suggests that educational planning plays a significant role in improving access to learning opportunities, facilitating effective programme organisation, providing instructional resources, enhancing instructional delivery, increasing learner participation, improving facilitator coordination, and sustaining lifelong learning programmes.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on How Educational Planning Improves Participation of Adult Learners in Adult Education Programmes

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	Std Dev	Decision
1	Educational planning increases accessibility of adult education programmes to learners	3.52	0.81	A
2	Educational planning improves awareness and mobilization of adult learners	3.44	0.76	A
3	Educational planning enhances the organisation of learning schedules for adult learners	3.29	0.73	A
4	Educational planning ensures availability of relevant instructional resources for learning	3.57	0.68	A
5	Educational planning improves coordination of	3.26	0.79	A

	facilitators for effective delivery			
6	Educational planning enhances learner motivation and sustained attendance	3.48	0.74	A
7	Educational planning reduces barriers limiting participation in adult education programmes	3.61	0.69	A
Aggregate Score		3.45	0.74	A

Data in Table 2 indicate that all item mean scores are above the criterion mean of 2.50, showing general agreement among respondents on all indicators. The aggregate score ($\bar{X} = 3.45$; $SD = 0.74$) indicates a high level of agreement with moderate consistency in responses. This implies that educational planning improves participation of adult learners in adult education programmes by enhancing accessibility, improving awareness and mobilization, ensuring proper scheduling of learning activities, providing adequate instructional resources, strengthening coordination of facilitators, increasing learner motivation, and reducing barriers that limit participation.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the Ways Educational Planning Contributes to Sustainable Community Development through Adult Education Programmes

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	Std Dev	Decision
1	Educational planning promotes acquisition of vocational skills among adult learners	3.58	0.70	A
2	Educational planning enhances self-reliance among community members	3.46	0.74	A
3	Educational planning supports poverty reduction through adult education programmes	3.63	0.68	A
4	Educational planning improves employment opportunities for adult learners	3.49	0.77	A
5	Educational planning strengthens community participation in development activities	3.55	0.71	A
6	Educational planning promotes entrepreneurial development in communities	3.41	0.75	A
7	Educational planning contributes to improved standard of living in communities	3.60	0.69	A
Aggregate Score		3.53	0.72	A

Data in Table 3 indicate that all item mean scores are above the criterion mean of 2.50, showing agreement among respondents on all indicators. The aggregate score ($\bar{X} = 3.53$; $SD = 0.72$) reflects a high level of agreement with relatively low variability in responses, indicating consistency in respondents' opinions. This implies that educational planning contributes to sustainable community development through adult education programmes by enhancing vocational skill acquisition, promoting self-reliance, reducing poverty, improving employment opportunities, strengthening community participation in development activities, encouraging entrepreneurial growth, and improving the overall standard of living in communities.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that educational planning enhances lifelong learning opportunities among adult learners by improving access, participation, and structured delivery of adult education programmes. The findings further showed that when educational activities are properly planned, adult learners are more likely to engage in continuous learning that supports skill acquisition and personal development. This implies that effective planning provides the necessary framework for organizing learning contents, mobilizing resources, and ensuring continuity in adult education programmes. The findings are in consonance with the study of Akinpelu (2022) who posited that effective educational planning significantly improves adult learners' access to learning opportunities and strengthens participation in vocational and literacy programmes. Similarly, Ogunode (2021) found that educational planning plays a vital role in enhancing the structure and effectiveness of adult education programmes, thereby promoting continuous learning and human capacity development. In the same direction, Ojedele (2021) emphasized that systematic educational planning ensures the proper coordination of adult education programmes, which in turn enhances lifelong learning opportunities among adults.

The findings of the study revealed that educational planning improves participation of adult learners in adult education programmes through effective organization, proper resource allocation, and structured programme delivery. The results indicated that when adult education programmes are well planned, adult learners are more motivated to participate actively due to improved accessibility, relevance of content, and availability of learning materials. This suggests that planning plays a central role in sustaining learner engagement and reducing dropout rates in adult education programmes. The findings are in consonance with the study of Akinpelu (2022) who reported that proper educational planning enhances learner participation by ensuring effective organization and delivery of adult education programmes. In the same vein, Nwafor (2023) found that lifelong learning programmes that are properly structured and planned encourage greater participation of adult learners, especially in rural communities, thereby promoting empowerment and social inclusion. Similarly, Merriam (2020) emphasized that well-organized adult learning environments foster higher participation rates because learners are more motivated when programmes are relevant and systematically delivered.

The findings of the study revealed that educational planning contributes to sustainable community development through adult education programmes by promoting skill acquisition, empowerment, self-reliance, and improved socio-economic conditions among adult learners. The findings also showed that when adult education programmes are effectively planned, they become powerful tools for addressing poverty, unemployment, and low productivity in communities. This indicates that educational planning plays a strategic role in linking adult learning activities to community development goals. The findings are in consonance with the study of Adebisi (2022) who posited that adult education programmes, when properly planned, significantly contribute to sustainable community development through empowerment and entrepreneurial skill acquisition. Similarly, Ojedele (2021) and Merriam (2020) emphasized that development processes that are well-structured and inclusive lead to improved community welfare and sustainability. In addition, United Nations Development Programme (2021) noted that well-planned educational interventions contribute to human development by enhancing skills, productivity, and community participation in development activities.

Educational Implications of the Study

The findings of this study imply that effective educational planning is central to the of adult education programmes and the achievement of lifelong learning outcomes. It shows that when adult education is properly planned, access to learning opportunities, learner participation, and programme effectiveness are significantly improved. This underscores the need for educational administrators to strengthen planning structures in order to enhance programme delivery. The study also implies that increased participation of adult learners is largely dependent on well-organised educational planning processes. Therefore, adult education providers should prioritise proper scheduling, adequate provision of instructional materials, and effective coordination of facilitators to sustain learner engagement. Furthermore, the results suggest that sustainable community development is strongly influenced by the quality of educational planning in adult education. This means that policymakers and government agencies should invest more in structured planning of adult education programmes, as this will enhance skill acquisition, self-reliance, and socio-economic development within communities.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to existing knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between educational planning, lifelong learning, and sustainable community development within the context of adult education. It establishes that effective educational planning is a critical determinant of improved access to lifelong learning opportunities, increased participation of adult learners, and enhanced programme delivery in adult education. The study further expands understanding by demonstrating that educational planning does not only influence participation and access but also plays a central role in strengthening the sustainability and effectiveness of adult education programmes. In addition, the study adds to knowledge by empirically linking educational planning with sustainable community development outcomes such as vocational skill acquisition, self-reliance, employment generation, entrepreneurship development, poverty reduction, and improved living standards. It therefore provides a clearer understanding of how structured planning in adult education serves as a practical tool for community transformation. The findings also offer a useful framework for policymakers and educational administrators in designing and implementing more effective adult education programmes that are capable of promoting lifelong learning and sustainable development in communities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that educational planning significantly enhances lifelong learning opportunities among adult learners through improved access, organisation, provision of instructional materials, and continuity of adult education programmes. The study further concluded that effective educational planning improves the participation of adult learners in adult education programmes by enhancing accessibility, mobilisation, structured scheduling, resource availability, and reduction of barriers to participation. In addition, it was concluded that educational planning contributes to sustainable community development through adult education by promoting vocational skills acquisition, self-reliance, employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, poverty reduction, and improved living standards in communities. Overall, the effectiveness of adult education programmes and their developmental impact are strongly dependent on the quality of educational planning.

Recommendations

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

1. Government and educational authorities should strengthen educational planning in adult education programmes because this will enhance lifelong learning opportunities, improve learner participation, and promote effective programme delivery.
2. Adult education administrators should ensure proper organisation, adequate provision of instructional materials, and effective mobilisation of learners because this will increase participation and improve the quality of adult education programmes.
3. Government and stakeholders should invest more in structured adult education planning because this will promote skill acquisition, self-reliance, and sustainable community development.

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