**Southeast Asian Journal of Global Trends and Issues in Education**
E-ISSN 3110-6714 | Print ISSN 3110-679X, Volume 2, Issue 3 (2026), DOI: 10.64420/sajgtie.v2i3
Journal homepage: https://ojs.aeducia.org/index.php/sajgtie




# Repositioning Mass Literacy Education Praxis for Sustaining Economic Development in Rural Communities of Ondo State, Nigeria

Sunday Oyelowo Okemakinde

**Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to:**
* Sunday Oyelowo Okemakinde, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo. Nigeria, okemakindesunday@gmail.com

**This article is available online via the following issue link:**
https://doi.org/10.64420/sajgtie.v2i3

**How to Cite this Article:**

Okemakinde, S. O. (2026). Repositioning Mass Literacy Education Praxis for Sustaining Economic Development in Rural Communities of Ondo State, Nigeria. *Southeast Asian Journal of Global Trends and Issues in Education*, 2(3), 112-122. https://doi.org/10.64420/sajgtie.v2i3.664

## SCROLL DOWN TO READ THIS ARTICLE

Academia Edu Cendekia Indonesia (AEDUCIA), as the publisher, makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all information (the "Content") contained in its publications. However, we make no representations or warranties regarding the accuracy, completeness, or suitability of the Content for any purpose. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the views of, nor are they endorsed by, AEDUCIA. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon without independent verification using primary sources. AEDUCIA shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, or other liabilities, whether direct or indirect, arising from the use of the Content.

Southeast Asian Journal of Global Trends and Issues in Education (SAJGTIE), is published by AEDUCIA and complies with the Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing in Scholarly Publishing at all stages of the publication process. SAJGTIE may include links to external websites operated by third parties. These links are provided solely for the dissemination of scholarly knowledge in the fields of education. AEDUCIA does not assume responsibility for the content or accuracy of information on external websites.

## Article Information

**Copyright holder:**
© Okemakinde, S.O. (2026)

**First Publication Right:**
Southeast Asian Journal of Global Trends and Issues in Education

**Article info:**
DOI: https://doi.org/10.64420/sajgtie.v2i3.664

**Word Count:** 6785

**Publisher's Note:**
The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of AEDUCIA and/or the editor(s). AEDUCIA and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.

**This Article is licensed under the:** CC BY-SA 4.0

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information, are available at:
https://ojs.aeducia.org/index.php/sajgtie/about

Copyright @ 2026 by the author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0) License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)



Contents lists available at ojs.aeducia.org

**Southeast Asian J. Glob. Trends IssuesQ Educ.**

Volume 2, Issue 3 (2026), DOI: 10.64420/sajgtie.v2i3

Journal homepage: https://ojs.aeducia.org/index.php/sajgtie

SAJGTIE

E-ISSN 3110-6714

P-ISSN 3110-679X

**Conceptual Article** **Read Online:** https://doi.org/10.64420/sajgtie.v2i3.664 **Open Access**

# Repositioning Mass Literacy Education Praxis for Sustaining Economic Development in Rural Communities of Ondo State, Nigeria

Sunday Oyelowo Okemakinde

Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo. Nigeria

**ARTICLE HISTORY**

Received: August 28, 2026
Revised: October 17, 2026
Accepted: October 20, 2026
Published: October 24, 2026

**KEYWORDS**

Mass literacy education;
Rural communities;
Skill acquisition;
Sustainable economic development.

**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** In rural agrarian societies like Ondo State, pervasive illiteracy impedes technology adoption, financial access, and poverty reduction, while centralized statutory programs fail to translate statistical literacy gains into meaningful economic participation. Objective: This conceptual study examines the nexus between mass literacy and sustainable economic development, analyzes institutional bottlenecks within Nigerian literacy frameworks, and conceptualizes a repositioned praxis tailored to rural agrarian realities. **Method:** Employing an integrative qualitative policy synthesis, this paper integrates critical pedagogy and capability frameworks to evaluate National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education policies alongside regional socioeconomic data. **Results**: Conventional autonomous literacy models focused on mechanical decoding fail against entrenched subsistence poverty. Educational interventions succeed only when repositioned as an emancipatory praxis linking functional numeracy with modern agronomic methods, rural entrepreneurship, healthcare, and digital financial inclusion. Addressing top-down curricular rigidities, farming calendar misalignments, and pronounced rural gender divides is essential for meaningful community impact. **Conclusion:** Mass literacy is an indispensable catalyst for transforming vulnerable subsistence farmers into autonomous economic agents through decentralized, community-anchored educational ecosystems. **Contribution:** This study enriches adult education scholarship by modeling mass literacy as an embedded capability praxis, providing actionable guidelines for establishing community learning hubs integrated with vocational and digital skills

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, mass literacy initiatives have evolved from rudimentary reading and writing campaigns into vital structural mechanisms for human capital development and socioeconomic empowerment. In Nigeria, deliberate state led interventions to eradicate illiteracy trace back to 1944, culminating in the establishment of the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC). Despite prolonged historical and policy commitments, universal access to functional literacy remains elusive, leaving a critical segment of the population without the competencies required to navigate pervasive economic challenges. Contemporary scholarship affirms that mass literacy extends far beyond mechanical decoding; it represents an integrative praxis encompassing contextual knowledge, intelligent reasoning, and higher order cognitive competencies essential for collective economic agency (Onwuka, 2024).

The nexus between human development and sustainable economic stability reinforces the strategic imperative of adult education. Human resource development must take precedence over mere natural resource exploitation, as human actors serve simultaneously as the primary producers and the ultimate beneficiaries of societal development

* **Corresponding Author:** Sunday Oyelowo Okemakinde, okemakindesunday@gmail.com

Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo. Nigeria
Address: 143 Ore-Ondo Road, Ondo 351101, Ondo, Nigeria

Copyright @ 2026 by the author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0) License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

(Osuala, 1995). Viewed from an economic perspective, mass literacy constitutes an indispensable socioeconomic investment. By fostering individual cognitive and productive capacities, mass literacy enables citizens to actively generate, participate in, and benefit from societal wealth creation. Conversely, widespread illiteracy operates as a structural bottleneck that suppresses aggregate agricultural productivity, restricts entrepreneurial adaptability, and entrenches subsistence vulnerability among disadvantaged populations.

To conceptualize this dynamic within adult education, mass literacy must be theoretically anchored in critical pedagogy and human capability frameworks. Paulo Freire's conceptualization of *praxis* posits that authentic education is never politically or economically neutral; rather, it represents a dialectic of reflection and action (*conscientização*) through which marginalized learners transform their socioeconomic realities. When reduced to passive rote learning, literacy fails to emancipate rural dwellers from poverty. Parallel to this, Amartya Sen's Capability Approach conceptualizes poverty not merely as income deprivation, but as the fundamental denial of basic human capabilities and agency. Synthesizing Freirean critical praxis with Sen's capability paradigm demonstrates that adult literacy must operate as an instrument of empowerment, transforming functional and financial knowledge into direct socioeconomic freedom, technological adaptation, and autonomous decision making.

The transformative potential of repositioned adult education is evident across broader sub-Saharan African contexts. Several developing African economies have actively shifted from basic adult alphabetization toward integrated, livelihoods based functional literacy frameworks. For instance, benchmarking initiatives such as Tanzania's historically grounded functional literacy and integrated community education programs, Kenya's integration of adult education into agricultural technology hubs, and Ghana's community based functional literacy programs (CFLPs) demonstrate that embedding functional literacy within microfinance, agrarian value chains, and digital numeracy markedly accelerates rural poverty alleviation (UNESCO, 2021). In contrast, Nigeria's adult education trajectory has largely remained anchored in conventional classroom centric delivery, struggling to align centralized curricular models with the localized agrarian realities of rural communities.

This institutional misalignment is acutely evident in contemporary Nigerian macroeconomic and educational data. While NMEC (2023) documented an official reduction in the national illiteracy rate from 38% to 31%, representing approximately 62 million illiterate individuals within an estimated population of 232 million alongside substantial numbers of out of school citizens, the World Bank reports that national poverty escalated to 46% in 2023 and is projected to worsen to 47% in 2024. This official narrative of educational progress has been critically contested; Egwu (2024) argued that national aggregate metrics mask profound spatial inequalities, with rural areas confronting severely depressed literacy levels relative to urban centers. This disparity is critically skewed along gender lines: Effiong & Okijie (2022) revealed that rural adult literacy lags drastically behind urban rates, with rural female literacy plummeting to 35.4% (compared to 59.5% for rural males), whereas urban literacy rates stand at 86.4% for males and 74.0% for females.

These educational disparities bear severe socioeconomic consequences for agrarian sub national jurisdictions, most notably in Ondo State. As Egwu (2024) observed, poverty remains a formidable barrier to national advancement, with roughly 87 million Nigerians living below the poverty line. In rural Ondo State, where a substantial majority of the populace resides and forms the agrarian backbone of the regional economy, inhabitants remain disproportionately disadvantaged in wealth, social mobility, and formal economic status. Pervasive illiteracy bars rural farmers and micro entrepreneurs from assimilating modern agronomic techniques, adopting technological innovations, and accessing formal financial mechanisms. As emphasized by Global Data (2022) and Azuka (2024), social stability and long-term economic development are achievable only when individuals are gainfully employed and secure in their fundamental livelihoods. Elevating Nigeria's standing on the Human Development Index inherently demands resolving this rural educational divide.

Overcoming rural economic distress requires concerted coordination between governmental bodies and non governmental organizations to translate statutory literacy objectives into viable operational practice. However, prevailing interventions consistently treat adult literacy as an isolated remedial campaign rather than a localized, livelihood integrated praxis.

This conceptual paper addresses this critical policy praxis gap within the rural communities of Ondo State, Nigeria. By synthesizing critical pedagogy, capability theory, and comparative regional evidence, this paper critiques the institutional bottlenecks characterizing Nigeria's mass literacy apparatus, evaluates the agrarian specific constraints of rural Ondo State, and articulates a repositioned, community embedded literacy praxis framework designed to catalyze sustainable rural economic development.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *2.1 Mass literacy*

The bid to revamp the national economy of Nigeria especially rural communities led to the broadening of Nigeria's idea about mass literacy. Nigeria no longer define literacy in terms of 3Rs only. The concept has gone beyond reading, writing and arithmetic. It now includes knowledge, skills and attitudes conducive to the enhancement of the quality of life (Anyanwu, 2002). To UNESCO (2000), literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. It involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their community and wider society. Mass literacy can be referring to as educational programmes designed for individuals in the society, particularly in marginalized populations (rural areas) who are unable to read, write or do basic arithmetic. It aims to empower individuals with the skills of reading, writing, and numeracy, ultimately contributing to societal development and self-reliance. The essence of mass literacy programmes is to improve the literacy skills of individuals, empowering and facilitate rapid political, economic, social development of the people and made them more productive and self-sufficient.

Mass literacy includes professional and technical knowledge which promotes a fuller participation by adults in economic and civic life. It is related to the pursuit of economic and social objectives, embracing an increase in manpower output, production of food stuffs, industrialization, social and professional mobility, creation of additional manpower, diversification of the economy, and so on. Such objectives according to Anyanwu (2002) and World Bank (2024) may be spelt out as:

a) To change the attitude of the people for the benefits of their country's benefit;
b) To open the way for the participation of the people in the socio-economic reconstruction of their county;
c) To increase the productivity of the people through functional literacy;
d) To create better family conditions;
e) To improve health and personal fitness (p.233).

The above revealed that, literacy education will elevate the status of rural communities of Ondo state and enable them to perform their developmental roles. In essence, it will assist rural communities to function effectively in the society in which they live.

Corroborating the above, Omolewa (1994) states that mass literacy education should lead to the transformation of mentalities, the e-awakening of autonomous individuals and groups to become critically aware of their own environment and themselves and to take constructive action to improve their condition and this modify man's relationship with man and nature.

### *2.2 Sustainable Economic Development*

Sustainable development is an ambiguous concept. This is because of the fact that most countries in different forms and stages of development aid wit varying socio-political and economic structures cannot all reasonably agreed to the same conceptualization. For this paper however, sustainable development has to do with participatory human development anchored on strict environmental protection paradigm and aims at capturing the broader picture of human welfare by considering three indicators – life expectancy; literacy and living standards (Bulus, 2024).

Akintayo (2001) submits that the conceptualization of sustainable development along the paradigms of economics and ecology were narrow and limited. He therefore opined that if any development is to be meaningful, there is the need to intensify efforts at promoting mass literacy. Ayichi (1995) and UNESCO (2024) sees sustainable development aa a developmental strategy that must seek to enthrone justice and equity in the society. This can be done by stressing participation and involvement of the local. It can also be viewed as a strategy of maintaining of the good living condition of the in any given area. One could therefore deduce from this that sustainable development means the process of ensuring an enduring good quality of human life while living within a geographical area. Hence, it is a long -term process of improvements, quite distinct from the short-term improvements that characterize project circle in Nigeria.

In line with the above, Aaron (2024), states that sustainable development in economic dimension implies the commitment of resources for improved and increased output, productivity and incomes, the appropriate incentives would have been created for accelerated growth, especially if supportive physical infrastructures like feeder roads, affordable housing and accessible electricity facilities are provided in adequate and stable manner.

### *2.3 The Nigerian Rural Communities*

A community is a social group, occupying a more or less define geographical area and based on the feeling that have for one another, such group according to Anyanwu (1999) may include: The family; the village; the town or clan; the tribe, state, or nation in which people share in common basic conditions of life. Rural community belongs to a group which is largely peasant cultivators, with at best minimal educational accomplishment. Due to rural people's need to stay close to nature and their farms, they live mainly in villages and hamlets. They operate in a harsh and hostile environment.

Characteristics of rural people in Nigeria according to Omolewa & Sarumi (2002); Okemakinde (2010) include the following:

a) Rural people constitute the vast majority of the Nigerian population;
b) Most of the food which Nigerians eat are produced by rural dwellers;
c) Most o the country agricultural needs for raw materials and subsequent industrial economic growth are produced in the rural area
d) Inequalities exist in social and educational amenities between urban and rural areas;
e) Inequalities exist in living standards of rural dwellers most of them live below substance level.

Obviously, high rate of illiteracy among rural communities retards economic development.

Many of the rural dwellers can neither read, write nor compute. Invariably, they are poor. Their children also have poorer access to educational facilities compared to the urban children. Their parents even prefer to take their children to the farm to help with farm work than sending them to schools.

Rural dwellers are ignorant, malnourished and disease-ridden. The quality of life in Nigeria's rural areas is very low and the people there need to be educated so that they can be more receptive to innovation. The type of education needed here is no other type of education than mass literacy. This is unconnected with the fact tat its is important role in the economic development of rural dwellers cannot be over emphasized.

### *2.4 Overview of Mass Literacy Programmes in Nigeria*

According to Omolewa (1981) the art of reading and writing originated from the Muslim traders and teachers to some parts of northern Nigeria in the eleventh century and by the Portuguese missionaries to the southern Nigeria respectively. The initial effort was to spread evangelism and produce fellowship and personnel. However, the end of second World War witnessed great upsurge for literacy education in the country.

The Nigeria government showing more interest in mass literacy entrenched it in the National Policy on Education (NPE). Sarumi (2006) states that the implementation committee for the NPE recommended in 1978 that the first task of the National Commission for Mass Literacy would be to float a mass literacy campaign (Blueprint 1978/79), while the Nigeria constitution of 1979 provides that government at all level (Ondo state inclusive) will strive to eradicate illiteracy. A ten-year mass literacy was also launched on 8th September, 1982 by the Alhaji Shehu Shagari administration as a way of eradicating illiteracy rate. The National Mass Literacy Campaign was relaunched on 8th September, 1992 by the Babangida administration.

Unfortunately, most of these campaigns were unsuccessful arising from lack of commitment and honesty of purpose on the part of leaders and followers in Nigeria: the problem of funding, absence of massive international support for Nigeria's efforts, political instability, unimpressive social, economic and political circumstance in Nigeria, large population growth, minimum impact of the literacy programmes on the people, lack of reliable baseline data, the problem of quality of infrastructure, and slow pace of training of literacy personnel in the application approaches to literacy promotion (Omolewa, 1997; Aderinoye, 2002; Okemakinde et al., 2007). Mass literacy can be used to wage war against illiteracy and …….in Nigeria. There is therefore the need n the part of government to be more committed in the implementation of mass literacy campaign in the country

### *2.5 Mass Literacy and Sustainability of Economic Development in Ondo State*

As a measure to sustain mass literacy programmes in Ondo state, Agency for Adult and Non-Formal Education was established by Edict in July, 1990. The Agency started its operations just like other Ministries and Parastatals. Some of the functions of the Agency according to Fabusuyi (2008) include the following:

a) Organising and carrying out literacy programmes through the establishment of basic and post literacy centres.
b) Creating awareness of the importance of literacy and eliciting the participating and co-operation of all persons in the task of literacy for al by the year 2015.
c) Developing literacy programmes for young people and adults with special attention to disadvantaged groups like women, the disabled and rural settlers, among others.

d) Mobilizing other social, economic and political sectors o our public life in the task of eradicating illiteracy within the shortest possible time.
e) The mass literacy programmes are targeted on the following groups in the state:
f) Under school age children (0-5) who are yet in formal schooling.
g) Adults and young people who are beyond school-age but never had the grasp of the rudiments of reading and writing.
h) Premature school drop-out who never stayed to acquire permanent literacy for effective work.

One major problem facing Ondo state like others states in the country is that of improving the living conditions of the people in the rural areas. If literacy education is made functional some of the state's problems will be reduced.

According to Aderinoye (1997) literacy education is needed to empower the recipient to acquire indispensable knowledge and skills that will enable him to perform more effectively in every social activity. Skills acquired through functional literacy makes individuals feel bold facing the challenges of the society.

This has to do with mass literacy leading to occupational efficiency and increase productivity. Since majority of them are farmers, the community change agent, extension workers and so on can lend supportive hands in promoting mass literacy among the farmers in the rural areas of the state with the attainment of literacy skills, the farmers recipient would be interested the more in his profession and will lead to the promotion of his/her agricultural development. A continuous increase in productivity and income, after some time will help in eradicating poverty in the rural areas of Ondo state.

There is no gainsaying that mass literacy has assumed a significant importance toward reducing the high rate of illiteracy among the rural communities of Ondo state. Through literacy programmes many villagers who could read nor write can now do so with ease. Changes follow in the way rural dwellers think and, in the things, they value and do. Their products are brought in and put for sale in large quantity and quality (Egwu, 2024).

The imperative and strategies for sustainable economic and rural development in Ondo state through mass literacy would therefore include the following:

a) Investing in human capital formation to alleviate poverty, human misery and stabilize population.
b) Ensuring food security (not just food sufficiency) through rural compensation measures like selective like poverty targeted relief.
c) Providing basic preventive health care system by ensuring that the current primary health care programmes are expanded into a network of community health clinics.
d) Providing health nutritional education for the rural people through community education.
e) Creating incentives for access to production resources and institutional services.
f) Empowering the citizens, via participatory and community-oriented development that is woven around local principles, skills and technologies and;
g) Protecting the environment by generating and facilitating appropriate resources management systems.

## 3. DISCUSSION

The conceptual synthesis developed throughout this paper reveals that the persistent underdevelopment of rural agrarian communities stems from an enduring structural disconnect between statutory literacy delivery and grassroots socio-economic realities. For decades, literacy planning within developing agrarian frameworks has treated adult education as an autonomous, mechanical transfer of basic reading, writing, and rudimentary arithmetic (Awgichew & Seyoum, 2017). This traditional approach treats illiteracy as a mere technical deficit residing within the individual learner rather than addressing it as a symptomatic manifestation of systemic socio-economic exclusion. While national literacy agencies and state level adult education boards have recurrently reported statistical increases in aggregate literacy headcounts, these paper achievements have produced negligible improvements in rural poverty indices. The stubborn coexistence of rising statistical literacy metrics and worsening subsistence poverty demonstrates the analytical bankruptcy of treating mass literacy as an isolated (Mirkhil et al., 2026), classroom centric campaign detached from the daily material survival of rural households (Shah & Steinberg, 2017).

To dismantle this policy impasse, adult education in agrarian economies must undergo an ontological reorientation toward an emancipatory educational praxis (Biao, 2024). Praxis requires the perpetual dialectic of critical reflection and purposeful action, ensuring that learning directly informs and transforms the learner immediate material condition (Obidiegwu & Oronsaye, 2026). In rural agrarian contexts, educational praxis cannot simply revolve around decoding abstract text or reciting standardized primers (Quintero et al., 2024). Instead, it must awaken critical consciousness among rural dwellers regarding the systemic bottlenecks that govern their livelihoods, including unequal market dynamics, exploitative pricing structures for agricultural produce, and institutional neglect.

When adult education fails to foster critical reasoning about local productive environments, learners remain passive consumers of rudimentary instruction rather than becoming empowered economic agents capable of interrogating and restructuring their socio-economic destinies (Reis & Sımões, 2025).

This theoretical imperative directly intersects with the imperative to expand human capabilities and collective agency within marginalized populations. Real economic development is fundamentally compromised when it is narrowly conceptualized as aggregate macroeconomic expansion, industrial output, or physical capital accumulation (Beling et al., 2017; Bello, 2024). Meaningful development demands the substantive freedom of individuals to pursue livelihoods they have reason to value, converting knowledge into concrete life achievements (Comim et al., 2008). Within peasant agrarian economies, adult literacy functions as an instrumental capability that unlocks a wider web of substantive human freedoms. It equips agrarian producers with the cognitive self reliance needed to reject asymmetrical contracts, comprehend input specifications, interpret credit conditions, and resist traditional patron client exploitation (Ciampi et al., 2022; Ninh, 2020). By expanding cognitive agency, functional literacy elevates human dignity, fosters self determination, and bridges the gap between individual capability deprivation and sustainable collective welfare.

A rigorous historical examination of past mass literacy campaigns in developing settings exposes why centralized, supply driven interventions inevitably experience pedagogical collapse (Bruthiaux, 2000; Székely & Mason, 2018). Historical literacy programs have repeatedly foundered on administrative top-down structures, unpredictable budgetary allocations, lack of baseline community data, and an absence of pedagogical contextualization (Psaltis et al., 2017). Rather than designing educational programs around the agrarian calendar and indigenous knowledge systems, centralized ministries have traditionally imposed uniform, urban biased curricula upon rural agrarian populations (Ansell et al., 2020). This institutional detachment alienates rural adults, whose demanding seasonal routines in planting, weeding, and harvesting leave little motivation for abstract, non functional classroom instruction. Consequently, these programs have suffered from catastrophic dropout rates, rapid post program literacy relapse, and minimal long term community engagement, underscoring the fatal consequences of administering adult education without localized structural relevance.

These historic shortcomings are acutely manifested in sub national jurisdictions where localized institutional structures encounter the harsh realities of rural urban polarization. In predominantly agrarian states, statutory adult education agencies have struggled against severe resource constraints, insufficient field personnel, and bureaucratic inertia (Desjardins & Ιωαννίδου, 2020; Negassa, 2019). Rural settlements remain geographically isolated, lacking reliable feeder roads, basic electrical infrastructure, and clean water supplies, which severely impedes the physical mobilization of literacy facilitators (Arewa, 2015; Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Furthermore, state level delivery models consistently fail to accommodate the extreme socio-economic vulnerability of agrarian households, where pressing poverty forces parents to prioritize child field labor over formal schooling (Parthiban et al., 2020). This educational neglect fosters an intergenerational cycle of illiteracy and impoverishment, rendering rural populations increasingly vulnerable to market volatility and social displacement.

The structural vulnerability of rural communities is further compounded by deep seated, institutionalized gender asymmetries that current adult education frameworks persistently ignore. Rural women constitute the indispensable backbone of agrarian labor, managing post harvest processing, subsistence farming, informal marketing, and household nutritional welfare (Fűrész et al., 2023; Patel & Dwarka, 2025). Yet, systemic socio-cultural restrictions, patriarchal norms, and disproportionate domestic labor burdens severely depress female literacy levels relative to their male counterparts. Mainstream mass literacy programs have traditionally operated through gender neutral frameworks that fail to provide targeted structural accommodations, such as community childcare, flexible learning hours, or safe communal spaces (Monga et al., 2019). By neglecting the distinct structural constraints confronting women, conventional literacy programs perpetuate the economic disempowerment of female agricultural producers, directly undermining household food security and aggregate community resilience (Steinfield & Holt, 2020).

Achieving sustainable economic development in rural areas requires a radical repositioning of mass literacy into an integrated, community anchored ecosystem (Maclean, 2012). This transformation demands that functional numeracy and vocational literacy be inextricably woven into modern agronomic techniques, micro enterprise incubation, cooperative bookkeeping, preventive healthcare education, and digital financial tools. When adult non formal learning is repositioned around the real livelihood needs of rural dwellers, literacy ceases to be a passive remedial exercise and becomes an active catalyst for agricultural modernization and market integration (Oljira & Hailu, 2021). Local communities must cease to be treated as passive recipients of external aid and must instead be empowered as the primary architects of their own educational and economic trajectories. Only through such a

holistic, praxis driven reorientation can mass literacy dismantle the structural barriers of rural poverty and secure enduring socio-economic sustainability

## 4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

### *4.1 Research Implications*

From a policy and governance perspective, these insights urge educational authorities, statutory literacy commissions, and agrarian ministries to replace uniform, classroom centric syllabi with decentralized, community anchored modules tailored to agricultural calendars and local production cycles. Implementing agencies must dismantle administrative silos by establishing institutional collaborations between adult education agencies, agricultural extension services, primary healthcare boards, and rural credit schemes. Furthermore, policy frameworks must prioritize targeted structural accommodations for rural women, such as flexible community scheduled learning sessions and communal childcare arrangements, while transforming community learning centers into holistic development platforms where functional literacy is directly paired with preventive healthcare education, modern farming practices, and digital financial inclusion.

### *4.2 Research Contributions*

This study advances adult education theory and rural development scholarship by bridging the conceptual divide between critical non formal education and agrarian socio-economic development. By demonstrating that basic alphabetization campaigns remain functionally inert against deep seated agrarian poverty unless reoriented as an emancipatory praxis, this paper provides an integrative conceptual lens explaining why official statistical literacy gains fail to improve rural living standards. In doing so, it enriches development literature by reinterpreting functional numeracy, vocational skills, and technological competence as vital components of human agency, establishing that sustainable rural development depends on elevating agrarian dwellers into self reliant economic actors rather than treating them as passive beneficiaries of external aid.

## 5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

### *5.1 Research Limitations*

Because this investigation is framed as a conceptual and policy-oriented synthesis, its primary limitation rests on its reliance on secondary institutional documentation, existing policy frameworks, and published socio-economic indicators rather than primary empirical field data. Additionally, while the focus on rural settlements in Ondo State effectively illuminates systemic challenges prevalent across developing agrarian economies, the analysis remains grounded in specific sub national ecological and agricultural conditions. Consequently, the conceptual deductions do not capture localized differences in cultural structures, educational infrastructure, and livelihood systems that exist across different geopolitical environments, such as pastoral communities or coastal fishing settlements.

### *5.2 Recommendation for Future Research*

Future academic research and policy interventions should implement mixed methods field investigations and longitudinal surveys across rural local government areas to empirically measure the causal relationship between functional literacy programs, farm productivity, and household income growth. Operationally, the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education must intensify investments in rural human capital formation to dismantle poverty, alleviate misery, and support demographic stability. Concurrently, governments across all tiers must reinforce community well being by integrating adult literacy initiatives into an expanded network of primary healthcare clinics that deliver essential preventive care, while establishing and funding community-based literacy programs specifically tailored to digital skills and localized vocational needs.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Sustaining meaningful economic development within agrarian rural communities remains one of the most critical structural challenges confronting Nigeria, and particularly Ondo State. The conceptual analysis established throughout this study demonstrates that adult non formal education cannot operate as a peripheral remedial campaign, but must be systematically repositioned as an empowering economic praxis that directly drives agricultural advancement, financial inclusion, vocational integration, and aggregate rural productivity. Conventional literacy models have consistently faltered because they treat literacy as an isolated, mechanical acquisition of decoding skills

detached from the daily material survival of rural farming households. Consequently, lifting rural populations out of subsistence vulnerability requires an ontological shift toward decentralized curricula that intertwine functional numeracy with localized agronomic innovations and accessible entrepreneurial competencies.

Realizing this socioeconomic transformation demands the immediate elimination of systemic institutional bottlenecks, including centralized syllabus design, rigid instructional delivery disconnected from agricultural seasons, and the chronic neglect of extremely rural gender divides. When statutory literacy agencies and sub national governing bodies establish community anchored ecosystems that integrate basic literacy with preventive healthcare awareness, digital numeracy, and local livelihood demands, education becomes an authentic instrument of human capability expansion. By dismantling these structural impediments, rural dwellers transition from marginalized aid recipients into self reliant economic actors capable of actively driving food security, accelerating wealth creation, and sustaining enduring regional and national development.

## Acknowledgments

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, for providing institutional support throughout the development of this conceptual study. Appreciation is also extended to local adult education practitioners and community organizers across Ondo State who's on the ground insights into rural literacy delivery significantly informed the conceptual discourse in this paper.

## CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

The author declares that this research and article were conducted independently with full responsibility for all data and no significant contributions from others.

## Declaration of Generative AI (GenAI) Usage in Scientific Writing

Generative AI (Google Gemini) was used solely to assist with language editing and manuscript flow. The author reviewed, verified, and takes full responsibility for the final content.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there are no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest that could be perceived as improperly influencing the conceptual framework, interpretation, or conclusions presented in this manuscript.

## Funding Statement

This research received no specific grant or financial support from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not for profit sectors.

## REFERENCES

Aaron, O'Neill (2024). Global adult literacy aged 15 years and older from 1976 – 2024 by gender. Retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/997360/global-adult-and-youth-literacy. on 3/4/2025.

Aderinoye, R. A. (1997). *Literacy education in Nigeria*. Ibadan: University Press.

Aderinoye, R. A. (2002). Literacy assessment practices (LAP) in selected developing countries: Nigeria case study. *A Discussion Document Prepared for ILI/UNESCO. Literacy Assessment Practices (LAP).* 2nd Experts' Meeting, UNESCO Paris, 7 – 8 March, 2002.

Akintayo, M. O. (2001). *Sustainable community development in Nigeria: Problems and prospects*. A paper presented at a national workshop on self-reliance for sustainable community development. Organized by the Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan. September, 17 – 21 2001.

Ansell, N., Froerer, P., Huijsmans, R., Dungey, C., Dost, A. C., & Piti. (2020). Educating "surplus population": uses and abuses of aspiration in the rural peripheries of a globalising world. *Fennia*, *198*, 17–38. https://doi.org/10.11143/fennia.90756

Anyanwu, C. N. (1999). *Introduction to community development*. Ibadan: Gabesther Educational Publishers.

Anyanwu, C. N. (2002). *Community education: The African Dimension*. Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Arewa, O. B. (2015). Constructing Africa: Chinese Investment, Infrastructure Deficits, and Development. *Cornell International Law Journal*, *49*(1), 101–139. https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/cilj/vol49/iss1/4

Awgichew, S., & Seyoum, Y. (2017). Integrated Functional Adult Literacy: Existing Practices and Challenges in Eastern Ethiopia. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, *5*(4), 86. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.5n.4p.86

Ayichi, D. (1995). Models of rural development in Nigeria: With special focus on the ADPS. In Eboh, E. C.; Okoye, C. & Ayichi, D. (Eds.). *Rural Development in Nigeria: Concept, Process and Prospects.* Lagos: Auto Century Publishing. 13 – 29.

Azuka, O. (2024). Literacy rate determines financial power. Retrieved from https://www.punchng.com on 4/4/2025.

Beling, A. E., Vanhulst, J., Demaria, F., Rabi, V., Carballo, A. E., & Pelenc, J. (2017). Discursive Synergies for a 'Great Transformation' Towards Sustainability: Pragmatic Contributions to a Necessary Dialogue Between Human Development, Degrowth, and Buen Vivir. *Dipòsit Digital de Documents de La UAB (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)*, *144*, 304–313. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2017.08.025

Bello, A. (2024). Navigating Beyond Economic Growth: A Holistic Approach to Development and Equality in Public Policy—Demystifying the Axiom "A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats." *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, *12*(2), 533–573. https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2024.122031

Biao, I. (2024). Adult education and social justice: international perspectives. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *44*(2), 242–244. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2024.2417547

Bruthiaux, P. (2000). Supping With the Dismal Scientists: Practical Interdisciplinarity in Language Education and Development Economics. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *21*(4), 269–291. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630008666405

Bulus, C. H. (2024). Education in rural part of Nigeria: Challenges and way forward. Retrieved from https://www.opinionnigeria.com on 3/4/2025.

Ciampi, L., Plumpton, H. J., Osbahr, H., Cornforth, R., & Petty, C. (2022). Building resilience through improving groundwater management for sustainable agricultural intensification in African Sahel. *CABI Agriculture and Bioscience*, *3*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s43170-022-00131-5

Comim, F., Qizilbash, M., & Alkire, S. (2008). The capability approach : concepts, measures and applications. In *The University of Bath Online Publications Store (The University of Bath)*. University of Bath. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511492587

Desjardins, R., & Ιωαννίδου, A. (2020). The political economy of adult learning systems—some institutional features that promote adult learning participation. *Zeitschrift Für Weiterbildungsforschung*, *43*(2), 143–168. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40955-020-00159-y

Effiong, U. & Okijie, S. (2022). Rural-urban polarization and the sustainable development of rural communities in Nigeria. Retrieved from https://www.researcggate.net on 5/4/2025.

Egwu, F. E. (2024). Nigerian literacy crisis deepening affecting millions of children. Retrieved from https://www.developmentaid.org. on 3/4/2025.

Fabusuyi, E. B. (2008). Development of education in Ekiti state within a decade: 1996-2006. In Boucouvalas, M. S. & Aderinoye, R. (Eds.). *Education for Millenium Development*. Essay in Honour of Professor Micheal Omolewa. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited. 236 – 253.

Fűrész, E., Tóth, É. S., Tóth, K., & Amariei, D. (2023). Adult education's role in rural development and women's empowerment in Tunisia and Hungary: exploring cross-regional collaboration, growth opportunities, and gender-inclusive strategies. *Studia Mundi - Economica*, *10*(1), 14–25. https://doi.org/10.18531/sme.vol.10.no.1.pp.14-25

Global Data (2022). Literacy rate in Nigeria. (2010 – 2021). Retrieved from https://www.globaldata.com/data-insight/macroeconomic/literacy-rate-in-nigeria. on 4/4/2025.

Maclean, R. (2012). Skills Development for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in Developing Asia-Pacific. In *Technical and vocational education and training*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5937-4

Mirkhil, F., Mahala, A., & Pal, S. (2026). Ending Illiteracy in India: An Inductive Model for Inclusive and Sustainable Educational Reform. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Research*, 140–153. https://doi.org/10.14741/ijmcr/v.14.2.6

Monga, M., Dzvimbo, M. A., & Mashizha, T. M. (2019). The Dynamics of Gender: A Grassroots Perspective on Economic Resilience and Empowerment of the Tonga People in Kariba. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal) Humanities and Social Sciences*, *2*(4), 115–124. https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v2i4.565

Negassa, T. (2019). Challenges of the implementation of Integrated Functional Adult Education (IFAE) in Ethiopia: A case of Oromiya National Regional State. *African Educational Research Journal*, *7*(3), 103–117. https://doi.org/10.30918/aerj.73.19.022

Ninh, L. K. (2020). Economic role of education in agriculture: evidence from rural Vietnam. *Journal of Economics and Development*, *23*(1), 47–58. https://doi.org/10.1108/jed-05-2020-0052

NMEC (2023). National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education. Federal Ministry of Education. Retrieved from https://www.nmec.gov.ng on 4/4/2025.

Obidiegwu, U. J., & Oronsaye, O. R. (2026). Freirean Literacy Approach: A Functional Model to the Solution of the Problems of Unemployment and Poverty amongst Nigerian Youth. *NIU Journal of Humanities.*, *11*(1). https://doi.org/10.58709/niujhu.v11i1.2457

Okemakinde, S. O. (2010) Adult education as a tool for promoting national development. In Kester, K. O. (Ed.) *Adult Education: Concept and Issues*. Ibadan: Amoluwa Publishers. 39 – 45.

Okemakinde, S. O., Okemakinde, T. & Gbenro, I. A. (2007). Education for all in Nigeria: Lifelong learning option. *International Journal of Literacy Education*. 4(1), 68 – 80.

Oljira, T., & Hailu, M. (2021). Integrated functional adult education program and its contributions for livelihoods in Ethiopia. *Heliyon*, *7*(8). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07718

Omolewa, M. A. & Sarumi, A. (2002). *Current issues and problems of adult education*. External Studies Programme. Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Omolewa, M. A. (1981). *Adult education practice in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Evans Publishers.

Omolewa, M. A. (1997). Nigeria's past mass literacy campaigns and the vision 2010. Paper presented at the joint staff/postgraduate students' seminar held at the Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Onwuka, A. (2024). Literacy rate determines financial power. Punch Newspaper. Retrieved from https://www.punchng.com/literacy-rate-determine-financial-power on 4/4/2025.

Osuntogun, D. A. & Akande, J. O. (2000). Illiteracy eradication among the Nigerian farmers for sustainable agricultural development: Implication for promoting adult education. *International Journal of Continuing and Education,* University of Ibadan, Ibadan. 1(1), 80 – 89.

Osuola, J. A. (1995). *Media for development*. Enugu: ACENA Publishers.

Parthiban, R., Qureshi, I., Bandyopadhyay, S., Bhatt, B., & Jaikumar, S. (2020). Leveraging ICT to Overcome Complementary Institutional Voids: Insights from Institutional Work by a Social Enterprise to Help Marginalized. *Information Systems Frontiers*, *22*(3), 633–653. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-020-09991-6

Patel, G. S., & Dwarka, D. (2025). Study the Participation of Rural Women in Agriculture Activities. *Advances in Research*, *26*(3), 94–102. https://doi.org/10.9734/air/2025/v26i31328

Plessis, P. du, & Mestry, R. (2019). Teachers for rural schools – a challenge for South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, *39*. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v39ns1a1774

Psaltis, C., Carretero, M., & Čehajić-Clancy, S. (2017). History Education and Conflict Transformation: Social Psychological Theories, History Teaching and Reconciliation. In *OAPEN (The OAPEN Foundation)*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54681-0

Quintero, J., Fino, M. A., Carreño, M., Bernal, M. R. G., Ferney, D., & Fonseca, L. (2024). La Guardia del Monte: Praxis, Educación Rural y Construcción de Paz en Colombia. *Revista Internacional de Educación para la Justicia Social*, *13*(1), 339–361. https://doi.org/10.15366/riejs2024.13.1.019

Reis, C., & Sımões, M. D. D. F. S. (2025). Problematising the Policies' Purposes of Adult Education: A Semiological Approach to the "NEAAL" and Its Lifelong Learning Reductionist Mindset. *International Journal on Lifelong Education and Leadership*, *11*(2), 75–87. https://doi.org/10.25233/ijlel.1589941

Sarumi, A. (2000). Mass literacy effort in the pre- and post-independent Nigeria: Some lessons from adult education historical research. In *Adult and Non-Formal Education in Nigeria: Emerging Issues.* Paper from the National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) Annual Conference in Ibadan. November, 27 – December,1, 2005.

Shah, M., & Steinberg, B. M. (2017). Drought of Opportunities: Contemporaneous and Long-Term Impacts of Rainfall Shocks on Human Capital. *Journal of Political Economy*, *125*(2), 527–561. https://doi.org/10.1086/690828

Steinfield, L., & Holt, D. (2020). Structures, Systems and Differences that Matter: Casting an Ecological-Intersectionality Perspective on Female Subsistence Farmers' Experiences of the Climate Crisis. *Journal of Macromarketing*, *40*(4), 563–582. https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146720951238

Székely, E., & Mason, M. (2018). Complexity theory, the capability approach, and the sustainability of development initiatives in education. *Journal of Education Policy*, *34*(5), 669–685. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2018.1465999

UNESCO, (2000). Education for all: Achieving the goals. Final report (mid-decade meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All) Paris. UNESCO Publication.

UNESCO, (2024). International literacy day 2024, UNESCO. Retrieved from https://www.unesco.org on 5/4/2025.

World Bank (2024). Poverty and equity brief: Africa western and central Nigeria. Retrieved from https://www.datacatalogfiles.worldbank.org on 11/3/2025.

## Author Information

* **Sunday Oyelowo Okemakinde,** okemakindesunday@gmail.com
Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo. Nigeria
Address: 143 Ore-Ondo Road, Ondo 351101, Ondo, Nigeria