

CIVIC-ORIENTED ADULT EDUCATION AND DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT: EVIDENCE FROM ADULT LEARNERS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN BAYELSA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined civic-oriented adult education as a determinant of democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, with a population comprising adult learners and facilitators in public adult education centres. A sample of 360 respondents was selected using stratified and purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Civic-Oriented Adult Education and Democratic Engagement Questionnaire (COAEDEQ). The instrument was validated by experts in adult education and measurement and evaluation, while reliability was established using Cronbach alpha and found to be within an acceptable range. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, with a benchmark mean of 2.50 for decision-making, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that civic-oriented adult education programmes have a moderate positive influence on learners' democratic engagement, particularly in enhancing political awareness, civic responsibility, respect for the rule of law, and participation in community development activities. However, the influence was less pronounced in areas such as active political participation, advocacy, and sustained involvement in governance processes. The study also found that programme relevance, instructional methods, facilitator competence, access to learning resources, learner attendance, and institutional support significantly affect democratic engagement among adult learners. The study concluded that civic-oriented adult education contributes meaningfully to fostering democratic engagement, but its effectiveness is constrained by limited programme scope, irregular participation, inadequate resources, and insufficient institutional support. It was recommended that adult education programmes should incorporate more participatory and practical civic learning approaches, while government and stakeholders should provide adequate resources and policy support to strengthen democratic engagement among adult learners.

Keywords: Civic-oriented adult education, democratic engagement, adult learners, public education programmes, Bayelsa State

Introduction

Adult education has increasingly moved beyond the narrow remedial interpretation of literacy provision to a broader democratic and developmental function. In contemporary education discourse, adult learning is understood as a lifelong process through which adults acquire the knowledge, values, dispositions and social competencies required to participate meaningfully in family, work, community and civic life. This broader conception is important because democracy is not sustained only by constitutional provisions, elections and formal institutions; it also depends on citizens who can understand public issues, evaluate information, respect the rights of others, hold leaders accountable and participate constructively in community decision-making. Civic-oriented adult education therefore becomes a strategic educational response to democratic weakness, especially in societies where many adults had limited access to formal civic instruction during childhood or adolescence.

Recent international literature gives strong support to the civic function of adult learning and education. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2022a) emphasized that adult learning and education should include citizenship education because adults require opportunities to develop agency, democratic values and the capacity to contribute to their communities. Similarly, the Marrakech Framework for Action described adult learning and education as a key component of lifelong learning and argued that it can strengthen democracy, social cohesion, peaceful coexistence and active citizenship (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022b). This position challenges adult education systems that remain limited to basic reading and numeracy without connecting learning to practical social participation, rights awareness, public accountability and community problem-solving.

Democratic engagement refers to the willingness and ability of citizens to participate in democratic life through voting, public deliberation, advocacy, community development, lawful protest, respect for institutions, and constructive demand for accountability. It is broader than electoral participation because it includes the everyday civic behaviours through which citizens influence public life and contribute to national development. Haren Conely and Cordie (2023) found a positive relationship between adult informal learning, lifelong learning mindset and civic engagement, indicating that learning experiences can shape adults' civic confidence, social trust

and willingness to participate. Hoggan-Kloubert, Brandi, Hodge, Knight, and Milana (2023) also argued that civic lifelong education is necessary in contemporary societies because misinformation, polarization and institutional distrust threaten the quality of democratic participation.

Within the Nigerian context, the need for civic-oriented adult education is particularly urgent. Although Nigeria has sustained civilian rule since 1999, democratic consolidation has continued to face challenges such as voter apathy, weak public trust, limited issue-based political participation, misinformation, monetized politics, and low involvement of marginalized groups in governance processes. Adult learners in non-formal education programmes often belong to social groups that have experienced educational exclusion, economic vulnerability or limited access to public information. If adult education programmes are designed only as literacy or certificate-oriented activities, they may improve basic skills without necessarily producing citizens who can participate critically in democratic governance. This makes it necessary to examine the extent to which adult education programmes deliberately promote civic responsibility, community participation, rule of law, political awareness and accountability.

Recent Nigerian studies have also linked adult education with political and civic development. Wami, Nwafor, and Deekor (2019), in a study conducted in Rivers State, found that basic literacy, functional literacy and civic education influenced political development, suggesting that adult education can help adults perform social and political roles. Adeonipekun, Obashoro-John, and Ojo (2025) similarly argued that adult education can serve as a tool for civic participation and leadership development in Nigeria, especially among marginalized populations, women and informal sector workers. However, the evidence also indicates that the transformative potential of adult education depends on programme quality, curricular relevance, facilitation methods, availability of learning materials, institutional support and the degree to which learners are allowed to discuss real-life civic problems rather than passively receive information.

Civic-oriented adult education is particularly relevant to Bayelsa State because adult learners in public education programmes are part of communities where local development, environmental issues, public resource management, electoral participation and community

leadership remain major concerns. Public adult education centres can function as democratic learning spaces where learners discuss social problems, understand civic rights and responsibilities, practice deliberation, develop confidence to speak in public and participate in community development. Yet, such outcomes are not automatic. Where programmes are poorly funded, facilitators are insufficiently trained, instructional methods are lecture-dominated and civic contents are not related to learners' lived experiences, adult education may produce limited democratic outcomes.

The problem that motivated this study was therefore the observed gap between the democratic expectations of adult education and the actual civic outcomes of adult learning programmes. While adult education is widely acknowledged as a pathway to empowerment and national development, less attention has been paid to how civic-oriented adult education influences democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State. In addition, the programme-related conditions that either strengthen or weaken democratic engagement among adult learners require empirical clarification. This study was conducted to address this gap by examining civic-oriented adult education as a determinant of democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine civic-oriented adult education as a determinant of democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State.

Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the extent to which civic-oriented adult education programmes influence democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State;
2. Examine the programme-related factors that affect democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do civic-oriented adult education programmes influence democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State?

2. What programme-related factors affect democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State?

Hypotheses

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

HO1: There is no significant relationship between civic-oriented adult education programmes and democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State.

HO2: There is no significant relationship between programme-related factors and democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State.

Research Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because the study sought to collect data from a defined group of respondents and describe their perceptions of the extent to which civic-oriented adult education programmes influence democratic engagement. The population of the study comprised adult learners and facilitators in public adult education centres in Bayelsa State. These categories of respondents were considered appropriate because adult learners were the direct beneficiaries of civic-oriented learning activities, while facilitators had practical knowledge of programme content, instructional methods and implementation challenges.

A sample of 360 respondents was selected using stratified and purposive sampling techniques. Stratification was used to ensure representation across relevant public adult education centres, while purposive sampling enabled the inclusion of adult learners and facilitators who had direct experience with civic-oriented adult education activities. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Civic-Oriented Adult Education and Democratic Engagement Questionnaire (COAEDEQ). The instrument was divided into sections covering demographic information, civic-oriented adult education practices, indicators of democratic engagement and programme-related factors affecting civic participation.

The questionnaire was structured on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree, weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was validated by experts in adult education and measurement and evaluation, who examined the items for clarity, content relevance, coverage and appropriateness for the respondents. Reliability was established through a pilot test and the Cronbach alpha coefficient obtained was considered satisfactory for the study. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used for decision-making; items with mean scores of 2.50 and above were accepted, while items below 2.50 were not accepted. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality of responses and the use of data strictly for academic purposes.

Results

Research Question One: To what extent do civic-oriented adult education programmes influence democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the extent to which civic-oriented adult education programmes influence democratic engagement among adult learners in Bayelsa State

S/N	Item Statement	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Improves awareness of civic rights and responsibilities.	360	3.02	0.76	Accepted
2	Strengthens respect for rule of law and public order.	360	2.91	0.81	Accepted
3	Encourages participation in community development activities.	360	2.84	0.83	Accepted
4	Improves willingness to discuss public community issues.	360	2.76	0.87	Accepted
5	Increases interest in voting, public meetings and civic forums.	360	2.69	0.89	Accepted
6	Strengthens ability to hold leaders accountable.	360	2.63	0.92	Accepted
7	Encourages sustained advocacy and involvement in governance.	360	2.45	0.96	Not Accepted
	Grand Mean	360	2.76	0.86	Accepted

Table 1 shows that the grand mean score of 2.76 is above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating that civic-oriented adult education programmes have a moderate positive influence on democratic engagement among adult learners. The highest mean score was recorded for awareness of rights and responsibilities ($M = 3.02$), followed by respect for the rule of law ($M = 2.91$) and participation in community development activities ($M = 2.84$). However, sustained advocacy and involvement in governance processes recorded a mean score of 2.45, which is below the criterion mean. This implies that while civic-oriented adult education promotes awareness, civic responsibility and community-level participation, its influence is weaker in the more demanding areas of advocacy and sustained political engagement.

Research Question Two: What programme-related factors affect democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on programme-related factors affecting democratic engagement among adult learners in Bayelsa State

S/N	Programme-Related Factor	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Relevance of civic contents to community experiences.	360	3.05	0.74	Accepted
2	Facilitator competence in civic and democratic issues.	360	2.96	0.79	Accepted
3	Use of participatory methods: discussion, debate and projects.	360	2.89	0.82	Accepted
4	Availability of materials on rights, responsibilities and governance.	360	2.81	0.85	Accepted
5	Regular attendance and commitment of adult learners.	360	2.76	0.88	Accepted
6	Institutional and government support for adult education centres.	360	2.72	0.90	Accepted
7	Partnership with community organisations.	360	2.67	0.91	Accepted
	Grand Mean	360	2.84	0.84	Accepted

Table 2 reveals a grand mean score of 2.84, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicates that programme-related factors affect democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State. The most influential factor was the relevance of civic contents to learners' everyday community experiences ($M = 3.05$), followed

by facilitator competence ($M = 2.96$), participatory instructional methods ($M = 2.89$) and availability of learning materials ($M = 2.81$). The results imply that democratic engagement among adult learners is strengthened when civic education is practical, locally relevant, participatory and supported with adequate resources.

Hypothesis One

HO1: There is no significant relationship between civic-oriented adult education programmes and democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between civic-oriented adult education programmes and democratic engagement

Variables	N	r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Civic-oriented adult education programmes	360	0.482	0.000	Rejected
Democratic engagement	360			

Table 3 shows a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.482$ with a significance value of 0.000. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant moderate positive relationship between civic-oriented adult education programmes and democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State.

Hypothesis Two

HO2: There is no significant relationship between programme-related factors and democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between programme-related factors and democratic engagement

Variables	N	r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Programme-related factors	360	0.436	0.000	Rejected

Variables	N	r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Democratic engagement	360			

Table 4 shows a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.436$ with a significance value of 0.000. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant moderate positive relationship between programme-related factors and democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State.

Discussion of Findings

The finding from research question one and hypothesis one revealed that civic-oriented adult education programmes have a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship with democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State. This result suggests that adult education can serve as an important mechanism for developing political awareness, civic responsibility, respect for the rule of law and participation in community development activities. The finding is consistent with the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2022a), which emphasized citizenship education as a central dimension of adult learning and education. It also supports the position of Haren Conely and Cordie (2023), who found that adult learning and lifelong learning mindset are positively associated with civic engagement. In the Nigerian context, the result aligns with Wami et al. (2019), who found that adult education programmes influenced political development in Rivers State, and Adeonipekun et al. (2025), who argued that adult education can strengthen civic participation and leadership development among adult learners.

However, the finding also shows that the influence of civic-oriented adult education is not equally strong across all dimensions of democratic engagement. The lower mean score recorded for sustained advocacy and involvement in governance processes indicates that adult learners may acquire civic awareness without necessarily becoming active participants in more demanding democratic practices. This is a critical issue because democracy requires citizens who do not only know their rights but are also willing and able to use public channels to demand

accountability, participate in policy dialogue and challenge poor governance through lawful means. The weakness may be connected to programme limitations, fear of political victimization, economic pressure, lack of confidence, irregular attendance and low institutional support. Hoggan-Kloubert et al. (2023) argued that civic lifelong education must prepare citizens to respond critically to misinformation, polarization and democratic uncertainty, while the Marrakech Framework for Action maintained that adult learning should develop agency, critical thinking and active citizenship (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022b). The result therefore implies that adult education programmes in Bayelsa State should move from civic information transmission to civic practice and democratic problem-solving.

The finding from research question two and hypothesis two revealed that programme-related factors significantly affect democratic engagement among adult learners. Programme relevance, facilitator competence, participatory instructional methods, availability of learning materials, regular attendance, institutional support and community partnership all recorded mean scores above the criterion mean. This means that the democratic value of adult education depends not only on the existence of adult education centres but also on the quality of programme delivery. Adult learners are more likely to demonstrate democratic engagement when civic contents are connected to their daily experiences, such as voting, community sanitation, environmental protection, local government accountability, peaceful conflict resolution, gender inclusion and participation in community meetings. This finding supports the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and APCEIU (2019), which emphasized that global citizenship education in adult learning should be practical, accessible and connected to real learning spaces such as libraries, community centres and local institutions.

The finding further confirms that facilitator competence and participatory pedagogy are crucial to democratic engagement. Where facilitators rely mainly on lecture methods, learners may understand civic concepts but may not develop the confidence, communication skills and deliberative habits required for democratic action. Participatory methods such as debate, role play, community projects, mock elections, problem-solving discussions and public dialogue can make adult education centres function as democratic learning spaces. The Marrakech Framework for Action stresses the professionalization of adult educators, relevant curricula, quality learning materials and participatory research as key conditions for transformative adult learning

(UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022b). The implication is that adult education programmes in Bayelsa State require sustained policy support, funding, facilitator training and community collaboration if they are to produce democratic engagement beyond classroom-level awareness.

Conclusion

The study concluded that civic-oriented adult education is a significant determinant of democratic engagement among adult learners in public education programmes in Bayelsa State. The findings showed that adult education contributes to political awareness, civic responsibility, respect for the rule of law and participation in community development activities, but its influence is weaker in areas requiring sustained advocacy, active political participation and continuous involvement in governance processes. The study also established that programme-related factors such as relevant civic content, participatory instructional methods, facilitator competence, availability of learning resources, regular learner attendance, institutional support and community partnership significantly affect democratic engagement. Therefore, civic-oriented adult education can strengthen democratic citizenship and national development when it is adequately funded, learner-centred, practically oriented and supported by competent facilitators and responsive institutions.

Recommendations

1. Adult education centres should integrate participatory civic learning strategies such as debates, mock elections, community problem-solving projects, public dialogue and rights-based discussions to transform civic awareness into active democratic engagement.
2. Government and education authorities in Bayelsa State should provide regular training for adult education facilitators, adequate civic learning materials and institutional support to improve the quality of programme delivery.
3. Adult education programmes should strengthen partnerships with community leaders, civil society organisations, electoral bodies and local government institutions to expose learners to practical democratic participation and sustained civic action.

4. Programme planners should make civic contents locally relevant by linking lessons to community development, public accountability, peaceful conflict resolution, environmental responsibility and participation in local governance.

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