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THE NEED FOR DIGITAL LITERACY OF ADULT LEARNERS IN ADULT LITERACY CENTRES IN AWKA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the need for digital literacy of adult learners in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Four research questions guided the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of this study comprised all the 889 adult learners in the 13 adult literacy centres in Awka South LGA of Anambra State. The sample size for this study consisted of 300 adult learners using multi-stage sampling procedure. Data for this study were collected by means of structured questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Digital Literacy of Adult Learners in Adult Literacy Centres" (QDLALALC). The instrument was subjected to face validity by two experts. The data collected were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha and an overall coefficient value of 0.78 was obtained. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions. The finding revealed that adult learners agreed on the need for internet literacy, information literacy, visual literacy and media literacy in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Based on the findings, it was recommended amongst others that adult literacy centers in Awka South should incorporate dedicated programmes on internet literacy, ensuring that learners are equipped with the skills to access, navigate, and utilize digital tools and resources.

Keyword: Digital Literacy, Adult Learners

Introduction

Adult literacy centres play a pivotal role in addressing the issue of adult illiteracy, providing a supportive environment for adults to acquire essential literacy skills and enhance their quality of life. Most of the goals of adult literacy education which are likened to acquisition of literacy and knowledge are implemented and realized in the literacy centres which offer different adult literacy programmes for adult learners. Literacy centres are therefore, learning centres or environment which provide classes for working adults who are looking to pursue continuing education options primarily at night or on weekends (Study.com, 2020). Adult literacy centre is a place whereby adults engage in systematic and sustained

learning activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values. It is a place where classes are held for adults (Educalingo, 2020)

Adult literacy education can take place through "extension" school or "school of continuing education". Other learning places include community colleges and folk high development, which are often associated with professional development. Adult literacy centre has also been referred to as schools, colleges and universities, libraries, and lifelong learning centres. In the literacy centres different adult education programmes are offered to equip adult learners with the necessary skills and competences in order to function effectively in their environment. The practice may also include digital literacy to distinguish it from pedagogy (Educalingo, 2020).

Digital literacy refers to an individual's ability to produce clear information through writing and other forms of communication on various digital platforms. Digital literacy showcases an individual's grammar, computer, writing, and typing skills on platforms, such as, social media sites and blog sites. Digital Literacy also includes ability to use other devices, such as, smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop PCs. While digital literacy initially focused on digital skills and stand-alone computers, its focus has shifted to network devices including the internet and use of social media. Digital literacy does not replace traditional forms of literacy. Instead, it builds upon the foundation of traditional forms of literacy. According to Van Laar, Van Deursen, Van Dijk and De Haan (2017), digital literacy as a large variety of complex cognitive, motor, sociological, and emotional skills, which users need to function effectively in digital environments. Eshet-Alkali and Amichai-Hamburger, (2018) revealed that the concept of digital literacy which has become a basic and necessary survival skill in the technological era comprises of a growing variety of cognitive skills that are extensively utilized while working intuitively in the execution of both simple and complex task in digital environments.

Digital Literacy is a term that comprises of other elements of information and communication technology. To fully grab the concept of digital literacy and adequately define it, a look at the various components of digital literacy is both necessary and essential. According to Payton and Hague, (2020); creativity, critical thinking and evaluation, cultural and social understanding, collaboration, ability to find and select information, effective communication, e-safety and functional skills are the eight components of digital literacy. Belshaw, (2021) opined that there are eight essential elements of digital literacy and that anyone seeking to fully harness their digital literacy skills ought to develop skills, attitudes and aptitudes in the eight areas which he identified as: cultural, cognitive, constructive, communicative, confidence, creative, critical and civic. This study adopted the dimensions of digital literacy of Ugwu and Umezuruike (2023), they are: internet literacy, information literacy, and visual literacy.

Internet literacy is a comprehensive skill set that involves understanding how the internet works, finding reliable information,

and protecting oneself online. It goes beyond technical proficiency and involves critical evaluation of online information, navigating digital environments safely, and harnessing the internet's potential for learning and empowerment (Anyikwa, 2016). Adult learners must develop skills to evaluate the reliability, accuracy, and relevance of online sources, including concepts like bias, authority, and fact-checking. According to Oyebamiji (2017), internet literacy is crucial for promoting digital citizenship and online safety among adult learners. In an increasingly connected world, adults must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to protect their privacy, safeguard personal information, and navigate online threats like phishing scams, malware, and identity theft. Adult literacy centers play a vital role in educating learners about internet safety practices, teaching them how to create strong passwords, use privacy settings effectively, and recognize and report online threats.

Information literacy is a crucial skill that enables individuals to locate, evaluate, interpret, and use information effectively. It is essential for adult learners to discern credible sources, navigate digital resources, and make informed decisions in the digital context. It involves critically evaluating online information for credibility, accuracy, and relevance, understanding concepts like bias, authority, and currency, and applying critical thinking skills to evaluate the trustworthiness of digital sources (Adamu, 2021). Information literacy is also essential for adult learners to effectively use digital resources for learning, research, and problem-solving.Adelore (2021) stressed that in an era where much of the world's knowledge is available online, adult learners must be equipped with the skills to search for information efficiently, evaluate its relevance and credibility, and synthesize and apply it to real-world contexts.

Visual literacy is crucial for adult learners to understand and engage with the vast amount of visual information available in digital environments. It involves the ability to interpret and critically analyze visual messages, understanding their meaning, context, and impact on individuals and society. According to Adelore and Itabanami (2016), this skill is particularly important for those seeking to access complex information in digital formats like educational materials, data visualizations, and multimedia presentations. Ugwu and Umezuruike (2023) remarked that visual literacy also allows learners to critically evaluate visual messages and media representations, recognizing and challenging stereotypes, misinformation, and persuasive appeals. It enables them to analyze visual techniques used in advertisements, news images, and social media posts, thereby engaging critically with visual culture and media representations.

Studies have highlighted the profound impact of digital literacy on the lives of adult learners (Oyebamiji & Ezeala, 2024; Ugwu & Umezuruike, 2023). According to a report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), approximately 23% of adults in the United States lack basic digital literacy skills, such as using email, browsing the internet, and completing online forms (NCES, 2020). This digital divide disproportionately affects marginalized populations, including low-income individuals, racial and ethnic

minorities, and adults with limited formal education. In this light, it is evident that digital literacy is not merely a technical skill but a foundational competency essential for full participation in modern society. Adult literacy centers play a crucial role in addressing the digital literacy needs of adult learners, providing tailored instruction and support to help learners develop the skills and confidence needed to navigate the digital world effectively. It is therefore against this background that this study seeks to determine the need of digital literacy of adult learners in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State

Statement of the Problem

Statistics from the Pew Research Center highlight the growing importance of digital skills in today's workforce. Despite the increasing demand for digital literacy in the job market, many adult learners face barriers to employment due to limited digital skills. Pew reports that 82% of job openings in the United States require digital skills, yet workers with inadequate digital literacy skills often struggle to secure employment or earn competitive wages (Pew Research Center, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the digital literacy gap among adult learners. With the widespread adoption of remote work and online learning, digital literacy has become an indispensable skill for navigating daily life during the pandemic. However, many adult learners have encountered difficulties in accessing online education, remote work opportunities, and essential services due to inadequate digital literacy skills. A survey conducted by UNESCO found that approximately 1.6 billion students worldwide experienced disruptions in their education due to school closures during the pandemic, highlighting the urgent need to address digital literacy gaps (UNESCO, 2021).

In light of these challenges, it is evident that digital literacy is not only a prerequisite for full participation in modern society but also a key determinant of socioeconomic opportunity and resilience. Adult literacy centers play a critical role in addressing the digital literacy needs of adult learners, providing tailored instruction and support to help learners develop the skills and confidence needed to navigate the digital world effectively. By bridging the digital literacy gap, adult literacy centers can empower adult learners to overcome barriers to education, employment, and social inclusion, ultimately fostering greater economic opportunity and societal well-being. It is therefore against this backdrop that this study determined the need of digital literacy of adult learners in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Hence, the following research questions were raised.

Research Questions

1. What is the need for internet literacy of adult learners in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State?
2. What is the need for information literacy of adult learners in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State?
3. What is the need for visual literacy of adult learners in adult literacy centres

in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State?

Theoretical Underpinning

Technology Acceptance Model

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was originally proposed by Fred Davis in 1986. It is a theoretical model that aims to explain the factors that influence individuals' intention to use new technology. The theory suggests that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are the key determinants of users' attitudes towards technology, which then influence their behavioral intention to use it.The Technology Acceptance Model posits that two primary factors determine an individual's intention to use a technology and their actual usage behaviour:

Perceived Usefulness (PU): This is defined as the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance their job performance. Essentially, if a user finds the technology useful, they are more likely to adopt it.

Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU): This is defined as the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort. If a user finds the technology easy to use, they are more likely to accept and use it.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is a widely tested and validated model that provides insights into user behavior and design for technology-based interventions. Its strengths include its simplicity, predictive power, and practicality, making it accessible to researchers and practitioners. However, it has limitations, such as its limited scope, lack of context, and overemphasis on rationality. The model focuses on individual factors, neglecting broader organizational or environmental influences. It also overlooks situational factors that may impact user behavior. Despite these limitations, the TAM remains a valuable tool for understanding and implementing technology-based interventions.

In the context of this study, TAM can be used to analyze how adult learners perceive the usefulness and ease of use of digital technologies in the adult literacy centers. This can help identify factors that may be hindering or facilitating the digital literacy of adult learners in these centers. By understanding these factors, educators and policymakers can develop strategies to improve digital literacy among adult learners and enhance their overall learning experience. Additionally, TAM can also be used to assess the adoption and use of digital literacy programs and tools in adult literacy centers. By examining the attitudes and intentions of adult learners towards using technology in their learning process, educators can tailor their programs to better suit the needs and preferences of their learners, ultimately improving the effectiveness of adult literacy programs in Awka South Local Government Area.

Method

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all the 889 adult learners in the 13 adult literacy centres in Awka South LGA of Anambra State. The sample size for this study consisted of 300 adult learners. The multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for this study. Data for the study were collected by means of structured

questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Digital Literacy of Adult Learners in Adult Literacy Centres" (QDLALALC). The instrument is built on two sections; A and B. Section A contains the demographic profile of the respondents. Section B is sub-divided into four clusters. Cluster I contains 10 items on internet literacy of adult learners; cluster II contains 8 items on information literacy of adult learners; cluster III addresses 9 items on visual literacy of adult learners; and cluster IV contains 10 items on the need for media literacy of adult learner. The instrument was rated on a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D) and Strongly Agree (SD) with values 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

The instrument was subjected to face validity by two experts. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a trial testing. Copies of the instrument were administered to 20 adult learners in Awka North LGA of Anambra State who were not part of the study population. The data collected were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha. Alpha values obtained after data analysis were 0.89, 0.78 and 0.89 for cluster I – III. Arithmetic mean was used to analyze data related to the four research questions posed and standard deviation was used to determine the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents' mean scores. The mean ratings were interpreted using criterion mean. Mean value of 2.50 and above means that such item is accepted while mean score of 2.50 below means that such item is rejected.

Results

Table 1: Respondents' mean and standard deviation ratings on the level of internet literacy of adult learners in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State

S/N	Item Statement	X	SD	Remarks
1	I believe internet literacy is important for my personal development	2.78	1.01	Agree
2	Internet literacy can improve employment opportunities for adult learners	2.79	1.04	Agree
3	Access to the internet is essential for learning new skills	2.67	1.03	Agree
4	Adult learners will benefit from using the internet for research and self-study	2.86	0.96	Agree
5	The internet can enhance adult learners' communication skills through email and social media.	2.66	0.99	Agree
6	The ability to use the internet is vital for accessing government and social services online	2.72	1.02	Agree
7	Teaching internet literacy can empower adult learners to participate in the digital economy	2.57	1.03	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**2.72**		**Agree**

Data in Table 1 reveals the item-by-item analysis on the level of internet literacy of adult learners in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The result revealed that items 1 – 7 with their respective mean scores 2.78, 2.79, 2.67, 2.86, 2.66, 2.72 and 2.57 were rated agreed by the respondents. The cluster mean of 2.72 summarized that adult learners agreed on the need for internet literacy in

adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The standard deviation scores ranging from 0.96 – 1.04 means that the respondents' mean scores were closely related.

Table 2: Respondents' ratings on the need for information literacy of adult learners in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State

S/N	Item Statement	X	SD	Remarks
8	Information literacy helps adult learners to identify reliable and relevant information	3.41	0.54	Agree
9	Adult learners need information literacy to improve their decision-making skills	3.18	0.69	Agree
10	Information literacy enables adult learners to access and evaluate information effectively	2.72	0.99	Agree
11	Information literacy helps adult learners to navigate digital environments, such as websites or databases	3.07	0.88	Agree
12	Information literacy enables adult learners to participate in social, political, and civic activities	3.18	0.89	Agree
13	Information literacy contributes to adult learners' personal development and professional growth.	2.98	0.91	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**3.09**		**Agree**

Data in Table 2 reveals the item-by-item analysis on the level of information literacy of adult learners in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The result revealed that items 8 – 13 with their respective mean scores 3.41, 3.18, 2.72, 3.07, 3.18 and 2.98 were rated agreed by the respondents. The cluster mean of 3.09 summarized that, adult learners agreed on the need for information literacy in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The standard deviation scores ranging from 0.54 – 0.99 means that the respondents' mean scores were closely related.

Table 3: Respondents' ratings on the need for visual literacy of adult learners in adult literacy centres in Awka South LGA of Anambra State

S/N	Item Statement	X	SD	Remarks
14	Visual literacy is essential for adult learners to interpret and understand visual information	2.55	0.58	Agree
15	Visual literacy helps adult learners analyze and make sense of charts, diagrams, and visuals	2.87	0.82	Agree
16	Adult learners need visual literacy skills to interpret media content effectively.	3.11	0.92	Agree
17	Visual literacy improves adult learners' ability to critically evaluate visual media (e.g., photos, videos)	2.69	0.69	Agree
18	Visual literacy is important for adult learners to engage with digital content, such as infographics.	2.53	0.88	Agree
19	Visual literacy helps adult learners interpret symbols, signs, and visual cues in various contexts	2.59	0.79	Agree
20	Visual literacy is essential for adult learners to engage with visual communication tools	2.72	0.74	Agree
	Cluster	**2.72**		**Agree**

Data in Table 3 reveals the item-by-item analysis on the level of visual literacy of adult learners in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The result revealed that items 14 – 20 with their respective mean scores of 2.55, 2.87, 3.11, 2.69, 2.53, 2.59 and 2.72 were rated agreed by the respondents. The cluster mean of 2.72 summarized that, adult learners agreed on the need for visual literacy in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The standard deviation scores ranging from 0.58 – 0.92 means that the respondents' mean scores were closely related.

Discussion of Findings

The finding in research question one revealed that adult learners agreed on the need for internet literacy in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. This finding means that the adult learners recognized the importance of being skilled in using the internet as part of their education and personal development. This consensus suggests that they believe internet literacy—understanding how to navigate the web, use online resources, and apply digital tools—is crucial for enhancing their learning experiences, accessing information, and participating effectively in today's digital society. This finding agreed with the finding of Punie, Jizah, Adzlian and Kamisah (2021) that discuss the increasing necessity for digital skills among adult learners, emphasizing how internet literacy empowers individuals to access information, participate in online learning, and improve professional opportunities. They argue that adult education programs must integrate digital literacy to remain relevant in the21st century. The finding of Rinekso and Rodliyah (2021) revealed necessity of digital literacy in educational settings. They argue that adult learners must develop internet skills to navigate online environments effectively, particularly in accessing educational materials, government services, and community resources.

The finding in research question two revealed that adult learners agreed on the need for information literacy in adult literacy centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. It means that these learners have recognized the importance of developing skills that enable them to effectively locate, evaluate, use, and communicate information. This finding was in line with the finding of Adewale (2019) that the integration of information literacy into adult education programs significantly improved the performance of adult learners, especially in terms of critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. Akayoglu, Satar, Dikilitas, Cirit and Korkmazgil (2020) found that many adult learners struggled with evaluating the quality and relevance of information. This study emphasizes the necessity of information literacy training not only in higher education but also in adult education centers to bridge this gap. The need for IL among adult learners in Awka South is likely reflective of the broader national context where individuals recognize the importance of these skills but may lack access to formal training.

The finding in research question three revealed that adult learners agreed on the need for visual literacy in adult literacy

centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. This means that these learners acknowledge the importance of being able to interpret, understand, and create visual content effectively. Visual literacy involves the ability to comprehend and analyze visual information presented through images, graphs, charts, infographics, videos, and other visual media, which are increasingly prevalent in today's information landscape. This finding was in tandem with the finding of Hague and Payton (2010) that learners who develop visual literacy skills can better engage with educational materials, media, and everyday life applications such as interpreting graphs, charts, or visual instructions. Avgerinou and Ericson (2002) argued that visual literacy helps learners in interpreting and constructing meaning from visual data, which is essential for critical thinking and problem-solving. Their research highlights that visual literacy should be a fundamental component of adult literacy programs because it allows learners to make sense of complex visual content, a skill particularly important in a world where information is visually presented through infographics, advertising, and online platforms.

Conclusion

The findings from this study unequivocally demonstrate that adult learners in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State acknowledge the critical importance of internet, information, visual, and media literacy in their educational journey. These literacies are no longer supplementary skills; they are fundamental competencies required to navigate the increasingly digital and media-driven world. Internet literacy equips learners to access and use digital resources effectively, while information literacy fosters their ability to search for, evaluate, and apply relevant information in practical and academic settings. Visual literacy enables them to interpret and communicate through visual mediums, which are becoming integral in both personal and professional environments.

Recommendations

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

1. Adult literacy centers in Awka South should incorporate dedicated programs on internet literacy, ensuring that learners are equipped with the skills to access, navigate, and utilize digital tools and resources. This will foster digital inclusion and bridge the technological gap faced by adult learners.
2. Literacy centers should embed information literacy into their curricula, training learners on how to search for, evaluate, and apply information effectively. This will empower them to become more independent learners and informed citizens who can critically assess the vast information available in the digital age.
3. Given the growing importance of visual literacy, it is recommended that adult literacy centers integrate more visual aids and multimedia content into their teaching methods. This will enhance learners' comprehension and retention, especially in a world where

visual communication is becoming more prevalent.

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