

PERCEPTIONS OF ADULT EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS ON EXPANDING SUBJECT-MATTER COMPETENCY FOR HUMANIZING ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study determined the perceptions of adult education administrators (AEAs) on expanding subject-matter competency for humanizing adult literacy education programme (ALEP) in Nigeria. It investigated whether the perceptions of AEAs on expanding subject-matter competency varied depending on opinions of experts in ALEP. Two research questions were raised, and one null hypothesis postulated to guide the study. The study used a population of 225 AEAs in Enugu State, Nigeria. Survey research design was used to collect data for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a uni-dimensional five-point Likert scale questionnaire with 58 items titled, "Perceptions of Adult Education Administrators' on Expanding Subject-Matter Competency Questionnaire (PAEAESMCQ)". The instrument was prepared and sent by e-mail to 225 AEAs. Construct validity of the instrument was done to determine the appropriateness of the dataset for factor analysis, and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.97 was obtained. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine the normality of the distribution scale, while Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the perceptions of AEAs across different groups. The findings of the study showed that AEAs felt quite competent about their subject-matter expertise. Subject-matter competency views among AEAs were found to be insensitive to factors such as gender, academic background, teaching experience as a facilitator, and discipline (adult education versus other fields). The study recommended that, in order to establish competency benchmarks that are consistent with global best practices, the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education should collaborate with the State Agency for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education. In addition, policymakers should allocate funds for continuous professional development of AEAs.

Keywords: Subject matter competency, Adult education administrators, Adult literacy facilitators, Adult literacy education programme

DOI: <https://doie.org/10.50390/NCAEJ.2026516261>

Introduction

In recent years, adult literacy education programme (ALEP) has gained increasing recognition as a vital tool for personal and societal development, especially in nations like Nigeria, where literacy rates continue to shape social and economic opportunities. According to Oyigbo et al. (2020), ALEP is a crucial component of adult education programmes meant to help individuals modify their knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. Hence, the standard of education serves as the foundation for a nation's development (Abid et al., 2017). Proficiency in adult literacy facilitation can be attained by adult literacy facilitators (ALFs). To maintain ALFs' level of competency, a few criteria are thought to be crucial, such as their capacity, experience, and quantity of training programmes (Haider et al., 2015). The success of ALEP hinges significantly on the subject-matter competencies of those who design and deliver the curricula (Fute et al., 2023; Klauth & Garza-Mitchell, 2023). Subject-matter competency

among ALFs is not just a technical requirement but a key factor in fostering a learning environment that promotes human dignity and personal growth (Kim et al., 2019).

However, the quality of ALFs in teaching and learning, as well as the achievement of adult learners in ALEP had continued to decline, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. This decline is evident in a recent report indicating that Nigerian candidates consistently performed worse than their counterparts from other West African countries in various subjects examined by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) from 1992 to 1999 (Jibril et al., 2020). Competent AEA in subject-matter play a vital role in improving the quality of ALFs, thereby enhancing ALEP and increasing participation of adult learners (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning [UIL], 2016). Providing ALFs with professional development opportunities and enhancing their knowledge and skills in adult learners' motivation and feedback literacy can lower drop-out rates and boost the effectiveness of the programmes' recruitment processes. Czerniawski et al. (2023) stated that all ALFs should see themselves as future AEAs and be trained in mentoring. However, even with this policy focus, many ALFs frequently do not receive recognition as potential AEAs. Adult literacy education centres vary in their models and work independently or with private providers, adding complexity to professional learning needs (Parker et al., 2021).

AEAs focus on teaching adult learners and continuing professional development for both beginning and experienced ALFs. Their roles can be traditional mentoring, supervisory across centres, or institute-based, with some involving research activity (White et al., 2015). Mutual respect, risk-taking, a determination to improve, and professional, progressive discourse are factors cited as essential for effective professional learning (Czerniawski et al., 2017). The professional learning of ALFs include the recruitment of ALFs; the design, implementation and evaluation of course components and their assessment (Czerniawski et al., 2017; McNamara et al., 2017).

The presumption that, if one can teach young people in schools, then they can also teach adults how to teach, and how to teach more effectively, is one that has permeated many adult literacy education systems and policies (Parker et al., 2021; Czerniawski et al., 2023). This presumption may help to explain why, up until recently, there were few formal options for AEAs to pursue professional development, and those that did exist varied widely in terms of their relevance and quality (Childre & Van Rie, 2015). However, other factors can also account for variations in provision of, and accessibility to, professional learning opportunities. Czerniawski et al. (2017) found that AEAs are moderately satisfied with their professional development experiences, but strongly desire further learning, influenced by best practice, academic skills, and curriculum knowledge.

Therefore, it is essential to efficiently utilize human resources to address the demands of global change. Qualified AEAs are needed to ensure the qualification and effectiveness of adult literacy education processes, as qualified ALFs rely on qualified AEAs (Goodwin et al., 2014). AEAs hold positions such as supervisors, alternate coordinators, coordinators, and directors of adult education programmes (Chiemeka & Obetta, 2015). AEAs are saddled with the following responsibilities:

- undertaking inspection visits;
- disseminating information about instructional materials,
- testing effective teaching methods and good practices,
- obtaining information in respect of challenges experienced by facilitators in learning centres,

providing advisory solutions through appropriate authorities, monitoring, documenting and publishing the overall quality of education in adult literacy centres, proffering practical and positive advice to adult literacy facilitators, and organizing meetings and workshops for the facilitators, when necessary, with a view to improving their professional competencies (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2013).

AEAs are in-charge of training the ALFs. The nature of teaching relies on an ALF's knowledge, capacities, and abilities (Abid et al., 2017). ALFs are insightful and competent in the learning pyramid, and their competency is crucial for the best education organism. The nature of teaching relies on various classroom methodologies. Competency refers to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teachers, including subject-matter knowledge (SMK), teaching abilities, dispositions, skills, and attitude (Abid et al., 2017). In the 21st century, ALFs are recognized for their teaching capacities and ability to impart thoughts to adult learners, while competency encompasses the necessary skills and capabilities for professional execution (Haider et al., 2015).

ALFs' competencies include SMK, pedagogical knowledge, and teaching abilities, involving working with adult learners, associates, and specialists. Shakir and Adeeb (2014) studied secondary school teachers' competencies. Most teachers are somewhat aware, with some moderately and others slightly aware. They are also competent in subject-matter knowledge, as demonstrated by studies by Yamtim and Wongwanich (2014) and Sali-Ot (2011). SMK is crucial for ALEP success, as ALFs need expertise in their respective disciplines to develop and deliver instruction that aligns with the programme's mission (Fleming, 2023).

From the foregoing, it showed that competencies are crucial for instructional leaders, professional developers, and AEAs in planning professional learning for ALFs. The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education (NMEC) is responsible for setting the standards and competency requirements for AEAs. According to Obetta and Oyigbo (2020), NMEC operates at the national level and works together with State Agency for Mass Literacy, Adult and non-formal Education (SAME). The mission of NMEC is to develop and sustain mass education for an enduring learning society as a critical lever for self-reliance and national development. Its vision is to eradicate illiteracy for national development and to provide mass literacy, adult and non-formal education within the context of lifelong learning for sustainable development (NMEC, 2013). The promotion of ALEP in Nigeria is guided by these two parameters: mission and vision of NMEC. ALFs are essential to the ALEPs' efforts to reduce illiteracy. They must be sufficiently encouraged with assistance and incentives to complete the mission of eradicating illiteracy in Nigeria. Therefore, the effectiveness of ALFs is crucial to ALEPs.

To develop a functional ALEPs, a wide range of competencies in relation to gender, discipline, experience, academic qualifications, and professional seniority are necessary. ALFs are responsible for mutual diagnosis of learning and identification of programme concepts (Obidiegwu, 2013). Therefore, to better the lives of adult learners through ALFs' programme, NMEC advocates the distribution of ALEP to the populace. Despite numerous initiatives to combat illiteracy, there are still many illiterates in Nigeria.

In Enugu State, through the promulgation of Enugu State Agency for Mass Literacy Law (Cap. 38 of 1991), adult education programmes are organized as learning opportunities for adults outside the conventional schools (Enugu State Government, 2012). The programmes

consist of adult literacy education, functional literacy education, remedial education, continuing education, aesthetic, cultural and civic education for the youth and adults outside the formal school system (Obetta, & Oyigbo, 2020). The main objective of SAME is to ensure that ALEP which included moral and civic education for adults, rural and continuing education programmes are organized and carried out with the aim of skills and certification acquisition. As such, AEAs should be competent in the subject-matter to assure quality teaching and learning in adult literacy education centres (ALECs). AEAs should develop technology skills, serve as role models, and motivate ALFs to improve ALEP through creative learning environments and motivational strategies (Williams, 2014; Czerniawski et al., 2015; Çiçek & Taşpinar, 2021).

The field of ALEP has evolved significantly over the years, with increasing emphasis on the importance of subject-matter competency and the humanization of learning environments. Globally, ALEP is now viewed as more than just the transfer of knowledge and basic skills; it is seen as a vehicle for personal empowerment, social inclusion, and lifelong learning ([UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022](#)). This paradigm shift is rooted in theories such as Paulo Freire's concept of education as a practice of freedom, which calls for a humanizing pedagogy that promotes critical thinking and the transformation of individuals and communities (Suzina & Tufte, 2020; Corbett & Guilherme, 2021).

AEAs are responsible for determining the success rate of ALEP, evaluating the ALFs' experiences and managing the process of recognition (Schmidt-Jortzig, 2011). In this regard, attempts have been made by NMEC to determine AEAs' competencies. However, to the best of the knowledge of the researchers, there is no research in Enugu State of Nigeria directed to determine AEAs' perceptions on expanding subject-matter competency for humanizing ALEP, whereas in countries such as USA, Netherlands, Norway, Turkey and Scotland, teacher educators' perceptions of expanding competencies were high (Krumsvik, 2014; Özüdoğru & Çakır, 2014; Holme et al., 2016). ALEP is driven by highly competent AEAs and ALFs who possess not only deep subject-matter expertise but also the skills to create humanizing learning environments. These environments would foster critical thinking, self-empowerment, and lifelong learning, aligning with global trends that emphasize ALEP as a pathway to human development. ALFs would expand their competencies continuously, adapting to evolving educational needs and helping adult learners thrive both academically and personally.

In recent years, there has been a growing body of literature advocating for the expansion of competencies among ALFs to include not only subject-matter expertise but also the skills needed to foster a learner-centred, humanistic approach (Howson & Kingsbury, 2021). ALFs are now expected to engage adult learners in ways that promote dignity, agency, and a sense of community. This requires ALFs to broaden their understanding of andragogy and integrate social, emotional, and cultural aspects into the adult learning process.

In the Nigerian context, the government and various stakeholders have made efforts to promote ALEP through national policies and programmes aimed at reducing the literacy gap (Ogunode, 2020). However, research suggests that the focus has often been on quantitative outcomes, such as enrollment rates and completion statistics, rather than on qualitative improvements in teaching and learning. The existing ALEP are frequently criticized for relying on traditional, rote-based methods that do not foster critical thinking or personal growth (Klauth & Garza-Mitchell, 2023; Moore et al., 2023). This highlights a gap in the professional development of adult literacy education practitioners, where subject-matter

competency is limited to technical knowledge without sufficient emphasis on the humanizing elements of education.

In addition, many ALEP in Enugu State, Nigeria face challenges related to inadequate training, limited professional development opportunities, and a focus on technical instruction rather than holistic, learner-centred approaches (Olojede, 2017). Expanding subject-matter competency among AEAs remains limited, and humanizing the potential of ALEP is often neglected. As a result, ALEP tends to fall short of its transformative potential, leaving adult learners without the critical skills needed to engage fully in society. This scenario creates a pressing need for an expansion of subject-matter competency, particularly as it relates to humanization of ALEP. The perceptions of AEAs, who are responsible for overseeing and guiding these programmes, are crucial for understanding how these competencies can be developed and integrated into a more human-centred educational framework.

Furthermore, studies on adult education in Nigeria reveal a shortage of comprehensive frameworks for expanding ALFs' competencies in ways that align with contemporary andragogical practices (Adeji & Tunde, 2020). The study therefore sought to explore how AEAs perceive and advocate for expanding subject-matter competency of ALFs to achieve a more humanizing approach to ALEP in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine the extent of perceptions of AEAs on expanding subject-matter competency of ALFs to humanize ALEP in Enugu State.

Research Questions

The following questions were posed for the study:

- i. What are the subject-matter competencies of AEAs based on opinions of experts?
- ii. To what extent do AEAs perceive themselves as competent in expanding subject-matter competencies?

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses that guided the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance are whether the perceptions of AEAs' competencies vary significantly depending on gender, discipline, experience as a facilitator, academic qualifications, and years of experience in the profession.

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was employed to investigate the perceptions of AEAs on expanding subject-matter competency in Nigerian ALEP. This design is suitable for gathering information about prevailing conditions, practices, beliefs, processes, relationships, or trends (Salaria, 2012). The survey design was chosen to describe the current state of AEAs' subject-matter competencies. The study involved 228 AEAs, comprising 17 coordinators, 58 alternate coordinators, and 153 supervisors in the 17 local government areas (LGAs) of Enugu State as shown in Figure 1.

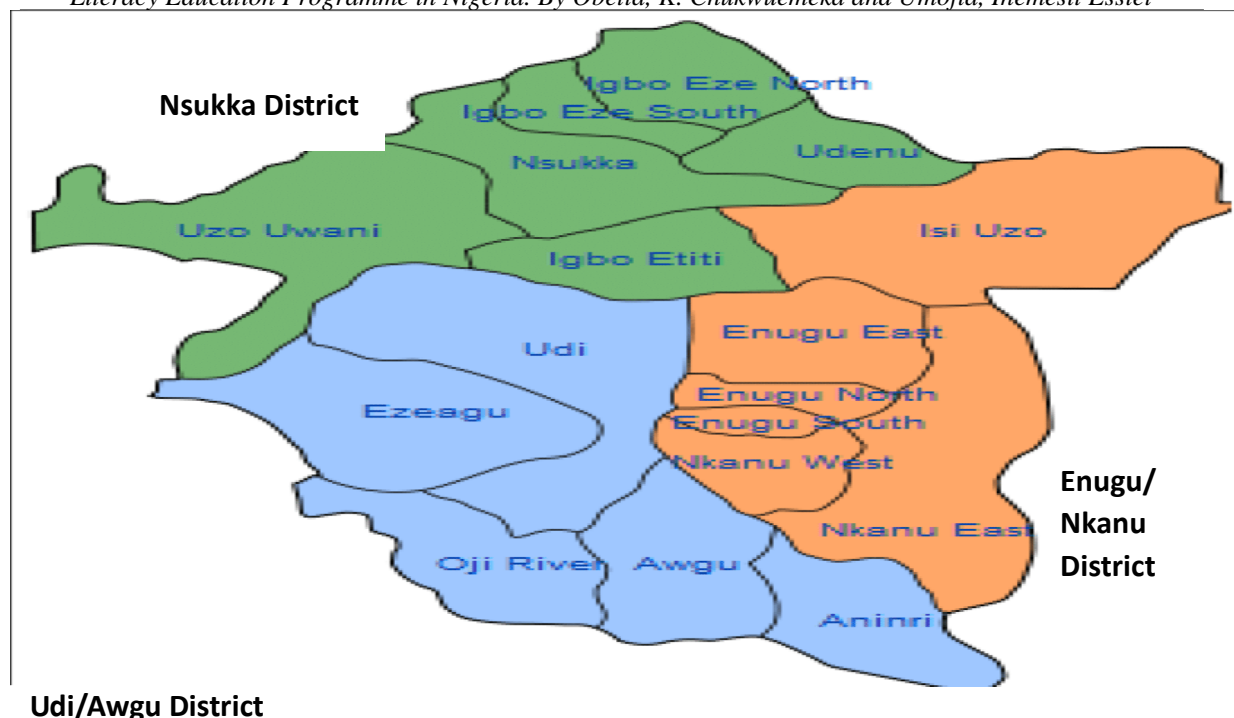


Figure 1: Map of Enugu State, Nigeria showing the 17 Local Government Areas

All AEAs within the state during the data collection period comprised the population. The survey was administered to all AEAs via email, and they were requested to complete it in the electronic format. To address research question one, a scale was developed based on expert opinions and the reviewed literature to measure AEAs’ perceptions of expanding subject-matter competencies. In Ishielu LGA of Ebonyi State, 24 AEAs participated in a pilot project. Both an online and pen-and-paper format was used to administer the draft scale. For reliability analysis and exploratory factor analysis, the pilot study’s data were employed. The sample for research questions two and three was chosen using a straightforward random sampling procedure. The online survey received responses from 225 AEAs in total, which gave an adequate sample size with a 95% confidence level and a +4% “tolerable error” ratio. Table 1 presented the demographic details of the AEAs who filled the questionnaire.

To assess the extent of AEAs’ perceived competencies in training adult literacy facilitators (ALFs), the researchers used the questionnaire they designed and developed. Initially, to design the questionnaire, three authorities in the field of ALEP were consulted. Additionally, the opinions of 12 AEAs from three local government councils (Nsukka, Udi, and Enugu North Local Government Areas) were gathered. The scale items were reviewed by three AEAs to decide the ones that should be in the final questionnaire.

The questionnaire was given to 42 AEAs to determine its construct validity, and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was used to determine the appropriateness of the dataset for factor analysis. The dataset was appropriate for factor analysis as the KMO value was 0.89 and the Bartlett test value was $p = 0.00$. The factor analysis revealed that the scale had a unidimensional structure, and the factor loadings ranged from 0.79 to 0.35. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.97, indicating high reliability.

A five-point Likert scale was used to structure the final version of the questionnaire, which had 58 items with the following options: “Highly competent”, “Competent”, “Partially

competent”, “Need to be developed”, and “Highly need to be developed”. The copies of the questionnaire were given to 225 AEAs, and the results of their answers were collated. The procedure for collecting the data was provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of the data collected in the study

Sub-Purpose	Sort of Data	Source of Data	Type of Data	n	Data Analysis
1 st sub-purpose	AEAs’ subject-matter competencies	AEAs	Qualitative data	3-12	Descriptive analysis, content validity
2 nd sub-purpose	AEAs’ perceptions of expanding subject-matter competencies	AEAs	Qualitative data	225	Percentage, frequency, Kolmogrov Smirnov, Median
3 rd sub-purpose	Whether AEAs’ perceptions of expanding subject-matter competencies vary significantly depending on variables	AEAs	Qualitative data	225	Kolmogrov Smirnov, Mann Whitney U, Kruskal Wallis H

Additionally, the results of the questionnaire regarding the expansion of subject-matter competencies perceived by AEAs were interpreted to reveal an interval coefficient of $4/5 = 0.80$. As a result, intervals were established as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Evaluation criteria of the scale of AEAs’ perceptions of expanding subject matter competencies

Response Options	Score	Score Interval	Scale Evaluation of Competency
Highly competent	5	4.26 - 5.00	Very high perception
Competent	4	3.44 - 4.20	High perception
Partially competent/partially incompetent	3	2.51 - 3.44	Moderate perception
Need to be developed	2	1.78 - 2.64	Low perception
Highly need to be developed	1	1.07 - 1.90	Very low perception

Results

AEAs’ perceptions of expanding subject-matter competencies:

The scale measuring AEAs’ perceptions of expanding subject-matter competencies was completed by 225 AEAs in Enugu State. The distribution of responses and median scores for the subject-matter competency items are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: AEAs’ perceptions of the expanding subject-matter competencies (n =

Competency Items	Kolmogorov K-S	Smirnov test p	Median
All the items (58 items)	0.07	0.00	* 4.12

225)
*p<0.05 significant

Table 3 provides an overview of the AEA's perceptions and the median scores for each subject-matter competency item. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine the normality of the distribution scale. The test revealed that the distribution of responses significantly deviated from a normal distribution ($K-S = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, it can be interpreted that the AEA's perceive their subject-matter competencies at a high level ($M = 4.12$). Some of the competencies were perceived to be at a medium level of competency. The key findings are summarized as follows:

As in considering others, society, and the environment, fostering empathy, persevering for one's own progress, embracing change for one's own growth, projecting confidence, and taking care of values education, AEA's thought of themselves as highly competent ($M = 5.00$). Scientific research, interdisciplinary research, general cultural knowledge, specialised subject area knowledge, educational technologies, the teaching-learning process, guidance, measurement and evaluation, personal characteristics and values, and professional development were the sub-headings under the expansion of subject-matter competencies. Two experts qualitatively evaluated the scale items. Therefore, the findings for each category are as follows:

Scientific research: AEA's felt competent ($M = 4.00$) in various items related to scientific research, such as using numerous points of view in their studies, applying diverse research approaches to improve the teaching-learning process, and researching teaching tactics, techniques, and procedures.

Interdisciplinary research: AEA's perceived themselves as highly competent ($M = 5.00$) in items related to interdisciplinary research, such as integrating discipline-specific knowledge with knowledge from other fields, collaborating with colleagues from different disciplines, and staying updated with interdisciplinary developments.

Specialized subject area knowledge: AEA's felt highly competent ($M = 5.00$) in items related to specialized subject area knowledge, including possessing knowledge and skills in their specific subject area, analyzing teaching-related problems, generating innovative ideas for teaching their subject area, applying subject area theories in practice, and understanding the values associated with their subject area.

General culture knowledge: AEA's felt competent ($M = 4.00$) in items related to general culture knowledge, such as philosophical knowledge, science history knowledge, social science knowledge, technological knowledge, and critical andragogical knowledge.

Educational technologies: AEA's felt highly competent ($M = 5.00$) in items pertaining to educational technologies, such as employing technology in teaching-learning environments, sharing information through technology, evaluating resources in technological environments, and supporting participation in distance learning.

Teaching-learning process: AEA's felt highly competent ($M = 5.00$) in items pertaining to the teaching-learning process, such as programme design, instructional design, and classroom management, organizing activities, planning and evaluating instructional methods, and supporting higher-order thinking skills.

Guidance: AEA's felt highly competent ($M = 5.00$) in items related to guidance techniques, such as providing opportunities for self-expression, interacting with learners at different levels, facilitating self-awareness and development, and adapting learning strategies.

Measurement and evaluation: AEA's felt highly competent ($M = 5.00$) in items related to measurement and evaluation, such as preparing exam questions, analyzing programme effects, and developing strategies for instructional improvement based on evaluation results.

Personal characteristics and values: AEA's felt highly competent ($M = 5.00$) in items related to personal characteristics and values, including qualities like standing against injustice,

protecting others' rights, self-development, communication skills, empathy, adaptability, self-confidence, setting an example, addressing individual differences, and upholding moral principles.

Professional development: AEAAs felt highly competent ($M = 5.00$) in items related to monitoring social development, following scientific advancements, and improving personal leadership characteristics.

Test of hypotheses:

To assess whether AEAAs' perceptions of expanding subject-matter competencies varied significantly based on gender, discipline, experience as a facilitator, academic qualifications, and professional seniority, statistical analyses were conducted. The results are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: AEAAs' competency perceptions in relation to gender, discipline and experience

Variables	N	Kolmogorov Smirnov Test		Median	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U test	
		K-S	p			U	p
<i>Gender</i>							
Female	106	0.07	0.00*	4.10	397.93	76361.50	0.74
Male	119	0.07	0.00*	4.13	392.45		
<i>Discipline</i>							
Adult Education	180	0.07	0.00*	4.10	391.26	47970.00	0.36
Other areas	45	0.07	0.04*	4.16	409.69		
<i>Experience as a Facilitator</i>							
Yes	138	0.07	0.00*	4.08	384.09	68728.00	0.09
No	87	0.09	0.00*	4.21	412.13		

* $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows the distribution of responses, and median scores based on gender, discipline, and experience as an ALF. The normality of distribution was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which indicated that the distributions for these variables significantly deviated from normal ($p < 0.05$). Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to compare the perceptions across different groups. The analysis revealed no significant differences in AEAAs' competency perceptions based on gender, discipline, or experience as a facilitator ($U = 76362.00$, $U = 47970.00$, $U = 68728.00$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, gender, discipline, and experience as a facilitator were not influential factors in AEAAs' competency perceptions.

Table 5: AEAAs' competency perceptions in relation to academic qualifications and professional seniority

Variables	N	Kolmogorov Smirnov Test		Median	Mean Rank	Kruskall Wallis H test	
		K-S	P			U	p
<i>Academic Qualifications</i>							
Ph.D	29	0.10	0.01*	4.11	384.10	2.94	0.71
M.Ed	45	0.08	0.02*	4.10	409.60		
PGDE	79	0.08	0.00*	4.07	380.19		
B.Ed	17	0.07	0.20	4.13	402.69		
NCE	53	0.08	0.01*	4.17	406.14		
OND	2	0.29	0.07	3.99	448.29		
<i>Seniority</i>							
1-10 years	85	0.06	0.02*	3.94	305.03	78.14	0.00*
11-20 years	68	0.08	0.00*	4.17	429.91		
21 years and more	72	0.11	0.00*	4.41	468.43		

*p<0.05

Table 5 presents the expansion of subject-matter competency perceptions based on academic qualifications and professional seniority. The normality tests indicated that the distributions for both variables deviated significantly from normal ($p < 0.05$). Kruskal-Wallis H tests were conducted to compare the perceptions among different academic qualification and professional seniority categories. The results showed no significant differences in AEAAs' competency perceptions based on academic qualifications ($U = 2.94$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, academic qualifications did not influence AEAAs' competency perceptions. However, there were significant differences in competency perceptions based on professional seniority ($K-W-H(2) = 78.14$, $p < 0.05$). Subsequent Mann-Whitney U tests revealed significant differences between the three professional seniority levels. The group with the highest perceived competency consisted of AEAAs with 21 years or more of professional experience.

Discussion of the Results

The findings of the study revealed important insights into the perceptions of AEAAs regarding expanding their subject-matter competencies. The results also shed light on whether these perceptions vary depending on certain variables. The study revealed that AEAAs generally perceive themselves as competent in various subject-matter competencies. AEAAs are highly competent in various areas such as scientific research, interdisciplinary research, specialized subject area knowledge, cultural knowledge, educational technologies, teaching-learning

process, guidance, measurement, evaluation, personal characteristics, and professional development. However, there were some variations in their perceptions within these areas.

AEAs felt competent in scientific research, such as using multiple perspectives and conducting research on teaching methods. This finding differs from previous studies that reported teacher educators feeling highly competent as researchers (Czerniawski et al., 2015; Cao et al., 2019). The finding suggested that AEAs may need to enhance their research skills further.

On interdisciplinary research, AEAs perceived themselves as highly competent in interdisciplinary research, which involves collaborating with colleagues from different disciplines. This finding contrasts with a previous study that highlighted deficiencies in interdisciplinary cooperation among teacher educators (Özder et al., 2014). AEAs' high competency in interdisciplinary research is encouraging and indicates their ability to integrate knowledge from different fields.

The finding showed that AEAs also expressed high levels of competency in knowledge of specialized subject area, general knowledge of the culture, employment of techniques and technologies in education and guidance. These findings are consistent with the expectations that AEAs should possess strong subject-area knowledge and technological proficiency (Krumsvik, 2014; Özüdoğru, & Çakır 2014; Holme et al., 2016). However, it is worth noting that previous studies have identified areas for improvement in these domains, such as using technology more effectively and enhancing teaching strategies (Tekmen & Kalelioğlu, 2014). Regarding the teaching-learning process, the finding of the study showed that AEAs felt highly competent in various aspects, including classroom management, instructional design, and programme evaluation. However, they perceived themselves as less competent in imparting learning skills to ALFs. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that teacher educators struggle with promoting self-regulated learning in their students (Greene, 2021; Karlen et al., 2024). AEAs should focus on improving their ability to transmit effective learning strategies to ALFs (Tekmen, & Kalelioğlu, 2014).

On AEAs' competency perceptions related to measurement and evaluation, the study revealed that AEAs generally have high competency perceptions in measuring and evaluating programme effects, indicating confidence in exam preparation and analysis. Additionally, AEAs felt they are competent in their personal characteristics and values, and as good role models (Zeichner et al., 2015). AEAs expressed a strong commitment to promoting lifelong learning skills and demonstrated a high level of competency in their own professional development.

The findings of the study further explored the varied perceptions of AEAs' competencies based on gender, discipline, experience as a facilitator, academic qualifications, and professional seniority. The findings indicated that gender, discipline, and experience as a facilitator did not significantly affect AEAs' competency perceptions. This finding aligns with previous researches (Zeichner et al., 2015). These factors were not influential in shaping their perceptions of expanding subject-matter competencies. However, the findings reported by Ghosh and Guha (2016) are in contrast with gender not affecting AEAs' competency perceptions significantly.

Based on the academic qualifications of AEAs, their perceptions on expanding subject-matter competencies did not vary significantly. This finding contradicts previous research that

suggested a correlation between academic qualifications and perceived competency (Brauer, 2021). Professional seniority has a significant impact on AEAs' competency perceptions. AEAs with more than 20 years of experience felt the most competent, while those with 1-10 years of experience felt less competent. This finding aligns with the notion that professional experience contributes to increased competencies and confidence (Tümkiye & Hurioglu, 2013; Izadinia, 2014).

Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the perceptions of AEAs regarding expanding their subject-matter competencies in the Nigerian ALEP, focusing on how these perceptions vary based on gender, discipline, experience, academic qualifications, and professional seniority. AEAs perceive themselves as highly competent in many areas, especially in aspects related to personal and professional development, such as empathy, adaptability, self-confidence, and values education. They also feel highly competent in specialized subject areas, educational technologies, teaching-learning processes, and guidance techniques. It indicates a need for continuous professional development. Such programmes should emphasize interdisciplinary research, the use of educational technologies, and instructional design.

AEAs are highly competent in various subject-matter competencies, including scientific research, interdisciplinary research, specialized knowledge, cultural knowledge, educational technologies, teaching-learning process, guidance, measurement, evaluation, personal characteristics, and professional development. AEAs' strong perceptions of expanding their competencies in subject-area knowledge highlight the importance of revising and enriching curricula to reflect real-world applications. Policymakers and educational institutions should collaborate to update the adult literacy curriculum, making it more dynamic and relevant for learners in evolving socio-economic contexts. While AEAs felt confident in most competencies, some areas, such as promoting self-regulated learning in ALFs, were identified as needing further development. It is crucial for educational institutions to provide on-going training in advanced technology integration to improve the overall effectiveness of AEAs in ALEP.

The study found no significant differences in perceived competencies based on gender, discipline, or experience as a facilitator. However, professional seniority was a significant factor, with AEAs who had 21 years or more of experience reporting the highest levels of perceived competencies. This highlights the value of experience in shaping competency perceptions. Senior AEAs with long years of experience should be given opportunities to mentor less experienced AEAs to bridge the competency gap and encourage knowledge transfer. In a related development, AEAs demonstrated a strong commitment to lifelong learning and professional development, which is essential for maintaining and improving their subject-matter competencies over time. AEAs' perceptions of expanding their competencies in scientific research, while generally positive, implies that there is need for improvement in research-related skills. Therefore, enhancing these skills would contribute to better teaching strategies and overall programme improvement.

The study, therefore, concludes that AEAs have a positive perception of their competencies across various areas, with professional seniority being the only demographic factor significantly influencing these perceptions. This implies that experience in adult education administration is key to developing higher levels of subject-matter competency.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education (NMEC) should work in collaboration with the State Agency for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education (SAME) to define competency benchmarks that align with international best practices. They should ensure that AEA certification includes a comprehensive assessment of these competencies so that only highly qualified administrators are responsible for managing adult literacy programmes.
2. Policymakers should allocate funds for continuous professional development of AEAAs. As such, AEAAs should receive sufficient training in modern educational technologies, scientific and interdisciplinary research, curriculum development, assessment methodologies, and adult learner motivation so as to help reduce dropout rates and improve ALEP participation. This would include training in online learning platforms, data management tools, and the use of smart boards and educational software to create engaging and effective learning environments for adult learners.
3. NMEC should work in collaboration with SAME to foster a sense of self-development and commitment among AEAAs by establishing motivation and recognition programmes that acknowledge and reward outstanding performance. AEAAs who demonstrate excellence in expanding their subject-matter competencies should be recognized through awards, promotions, or professional advancement opportunities to boost morale and encourage a culture of continuous improvement.
4. SAME should empower AEAAs to take a more active role in the evaluation and quality assurance of ALEPs. This could involve training AEAAs in the use of evaluation tools and methodologies that allow for a more systematic assessment of ALFs and programme outcomes, and ensuring continuous improvement in adult literacy education delivery.

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