



**AFRICAN SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL
IMO STATE UNIVERSITY
OWERRI, IMO STATE
NIGERIA**

VOL. 15 NO. 2A JULY 2026 (SPECIAL EDITION)

**ADULT EDUCATION AS A PATHWAY TO WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT, MIGRATION
ADJUSTMENT, AND SOCIAL INTERACTION: EVIDENCE FROM THE WEST AFRICA
MOBILITY CORRIDOR**

MORU ZAINAB

**Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education
Federal College of Education Okene, Kogi State, Nigeria
moruzainab1@gmail.com**

Abstract

Adult education has increasingly been recognized as a transformative instrument for enhancing women's socioeconomic outcomes, particularly within dynamic migration contexts. This paper examines adult education as a critical pathway to women's employment, migration, and social integration, with specific evidence drawn from West African mobility corridors. In the West Africa region, migration is deeply embedded by regional frameworks such as free movement protocols that enable cross-border mobility for trade, employment, and education. This study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach to explore how adult education programmes particularly literacy, vocational training, and digital skills development equip women with relevant competencies and navigating migration processes. The paper reveals that adult education strengthens women's human capital, improves their participation in both formal and informal labour market and enhances their capacity for self-reliance. It further highlights that education facilitates social integration by enabling migrant women to adapt to new cultural environments, access social services, and build supportive networks within host communities. Despite these benefits, challenges such as limited access to quality education, gender inequality and precarious employment conditions persist. The study concludes that promoting inclusive and gender-responsive adult education policies is essential for maximizing the developmental benefits of migration for women in West Africa. It recommends increased investment in adult education programmes tailored to the needs of migrant women to foster sustainable employment and social integration.

Keywords: *Adult Education, Women Employment, Migration, Social Integration.*

Introduction

Migration has increasingly become a significant phenomenon within West Africa, particularly following the adoption of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons. The protocol has enhanced regional mobility by enabling citizens of member states to move, reside, and engage in economic activities across national borders. Despite these opportunities, many women migrants continue to experience difficulties integrating into host communities. Challenges such as language differences, limited educational opportunities, inadequate

vocational skills, poor access to information, and insufficient knowledge of legal rights often hinder their social and economic participation. Economic Community of West African States Commission, 2020). However, legal mobility does not translate to employment security or social inclusion for women migrants (Aduloju, 2021 European Centre for Development Policy Management, 2019; International Organization for Migration, 2023). Adult education has emerged as an important strategy for addressing these challenges. Through literacy programmes, vocational training, financial education, language instruction, and civic education, adult education equips migrants with competencies that facilitate adaptation, inclusion, and economic empowerment. Consequently, adult education serves as a bridge between migration and successful integration by enabling women migrants to develop the capabilities required for productive participation in society.

Concept of Adult Education

Adult education has been identified as a critical intervention for addressing these migration challenges. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2021) defines adult education as organized learning opportunities for adults to improve knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Within migration contexts, adult education includes literacy, vocational training, financial literacy, language, and civic education. Prior evidence suggests that literacy and vocational training improve employability; financial literacy reduces exploitation and promotes formal remittances, while language and civic education enhance social integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). However, empirical evidence specific to women migrants in the West African corridor remains limited. Adult education refers to organized educational activities designed to meet the learning needs of adults outside the formal school system. It encompasses literacy education, vocational education, continuing education, civic education, and life-skills programmes aimed at improving individual and societal development. Adult education empowers individuals with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies necessary for personal growth, social participation, and economic productivity.

Women Migration and Social Integration in West African

Women migration has become an increasingly significant phenomenon in West African due to globalization, regional economic integration, urbanization, and the implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free of Movement of Persons. Traditionally, migration studies portrayed women as passive dependents accompanying male migrants; however, contemporary research recognizes women as independent migrants who move across borders in search of employment, education, trade opportunities, security, and improved living conditions. According to International Organization of for Migration (2024), women constitute substantial proportion of international migrants globally and play critical roles in economic development through entrepreneurship labour participation, remittances, and community development. In West Africa, Women migrants are actively involved in cross border trade. Domestic work, agriculture, hospitality services, and informal economic activities that contribute significantly to regional economic. The economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has facilitated migration within the region through the Protocol Free Movement Persons. Residence and Establishment adopted in 1979. This protocol grants citizens of member States the right to move, reside, and

engage in economic activities within the region. Despite these provisions, women migrants often encounter multiple challenges that limit their full participation in the host societies. Such challenges include language barriers, discrimination, and inadequate access to education, limited employment opportunities, poor legal protection, gender-based violence and social exclusion (ECOWAS Commission, 2020).

Social integration refers to the process through which migrants become accepted members of host communities and gain equitable access to social, economic, cultural, and political opportunities. According to Ager and Strang (2008), integration is a dynamic and multidimensional process involving access to employment, education, housing, healthcare, social connections, language competence, rights, and citizenship. They argue that successful integration occurs when migrants are able to participate fully in the social and economic life of their host communities while maintaining aspects of their cultural identity. Integration is therefore not merely the physical presence of migrants in a destination country but their meaningful inclusion in societal structures and institutions. In the West African context, social integration is particularly important because migration frequently occurs across countries with diverse languages, cultures and social systems. Women migrants moving between Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone countries often face communication difficulties that hinder access to employment, healthcare, education, and public services. According to UNESCO (2022), language proficiency is a key determinant of migrant integration because it facilitates social interaction, information access, and participation in community life. Without adequate language skills, women migrants may experience isolation and marginalization within host communities.

Furthermore, women migrants in West Africa often experience what migration scholars describe as “double vulnerability” arising from both their gender and migrant status. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2023) observed that women migrants are more likely to be employed in low-paying and insecure jobs, making them vulnerable to exploitation and social exclusion. Gender norms, cultural barriers, and limited access to formal education further restrict their ability to integrate effectively into host societies. Consequently, many women migrants remain concentrated in informal sectors where legal protection and social security are limited. Social integration contributes significantly to wellbeing and livelihood outcomes of women migrants. When migrants are successfully integrated, they are more likely to secure decent employment, access social services, build supportive social networks, and participate actively in community development.

According to Ager and Strang (2008), social connections serve as important indicators of integration because they promote trust, social cohesion, and access to opportunities. Strong social networks also provide emotional support and facilitate adaption to new cultural environments. Given these realities, promoting social integration among women migrants has become a major policy priority in West Africa. Governments, development agencies, and adult education providers are increasingly recognizing the importance of literacy education, vocational skills training, language education, civic education and financial literacy programmes as mechanisms for enhancing integration and livelihood opportunities. Though these educational interventions, women migrants acquire the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to navigate social institutions, understand their rights, access employment opportunities, and

participate meaningfully in host communities. Therefore, social integration should be viewed as a continuous process that empowers women migrants to achieve social inclusion, economic independence, and sustainable livelihoods within the West African region.

Role of Adult Education in Promoting Social Integration among Women Migrants in West Africa

Adult education plays a fundamental role in facilitating the social integration of women migrants by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies required to adapt successfully to host communities. Social integration involves the process through which migrants become accepted members of society and gain access to social, economic, cultural, and political opportunities (Ager & Strang, 2008) however, many women migrants in West Africa encounter barriers such as illiteracy, language difficulties, and limited knowledge of legal rights, inadequate vocational skills and restricted access to information. These challenges often hinder their participation in community life and reduced their opportunities for socioeconomic advancement. Adult education provides a strategic intervention for addressing these challenges and promoting inclusion. According to UNESCO (2022) Adult education promotes empowerment by enabling learners to acquire relevant competencies needed for effective participation in society. Similarly, Brookfield (2013) argues that adult learning enhances critical awareness and equips individuals with the capacity to navigate social environment. For women migrants, adult education serves as a bridge between migration and integration by facilitating access to language skills, social network, employment opportunities, civic participation and economic resources.

Literacy education and social integration: literacy education constitutes one of the most important components of adult education for women migrants. Literacy involves the ability to read, write, communicate, and apply numerical skills in everyday life. According to UNESCO (2023), Literacy is a foundational skill that enables individuals to access information, participate in decision-making processes and engage effectively in social economic activities. For women migrant, literacy facilitates access to essential services such as healthcare, education, banking, transportation, and employment. Literate migrants enhance self-confidence and reduce dependence on intermediaries who may exploit migrants because of their inability to read or write as noted by Bassey (2015), literacy education promotes social participation and empowers individuals to contribute meaningfully to community development. Consequently, literacy education stresses the capacity of women migrants to integrate successfully into host society.

Language education and social integration: language education is another critical instrument for promoting social integration among women migrants in West Africa. The region is characterized by linguistic diversity with English, French, and Portuguese serving as major official languages alongside numerous indigenous languages. Consequently, migrants frequently encounter communication barriers when re-locating to countries with different linguistic background. According to Ager and Strang (2008), Language competency is one of the most significant indicators of successful integration because it facilitates communication, social interaction, and access opportunities. Language education enables women migrants to communicate effectively with employers, government agencies, healthcare providers, and communities' members. It also promotes cultural understanding and reduces isolation.

UNESCO (2022) emphasizes that language acquisition enhances migrant ability to access public services and participate actively in civic life.

Civic Education and Social Integration; Civic education refers to educational activities design to provide citizenship, rights, responsibilities, laws, governance, and democratic participation. for women migrants, civic education is particularly important because many are unfamiliar with the legal framework institutional structure, and social norms of their host countries. According to Ager and Strang (2008), access to rights and citizenship is essential components of social integration. Civic education enables women migrants to understand their right under national laws and regional agreement such as ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons. It also increases awareness of labour rights, human right protection, legal procedures, and for seeking assistant when face with discrimination or exploitation. Furthermore, civic education encourages participation in community organization, local development initiatives, and social activities, there by fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion with host communities.

Financial Literacy Education and Social Integration: Financial literacy education equips women migrant with the knowledge and skills necessary to manage financial resources effectively. It includes competencies related to budgeting, saving, borrowing, investing, remittance management, and financial planning. According to the OECD (2020) financial literacy is essential for making inform financial decision and achieving economic security. For Women migrant's financial literacy contributes to social integration by promoting economic independent and reducing vulnerability to poverty. Financially literate migrants are better able to access banking services, manage household finances, and participate in economic activities within the host communities.

Adult Education and Livelihood Development among Women Migrants in West Africa

Livelihood development is a critical aspect of migration and integration because the ability of migrants to secure sustainable sources of income largely determines their quality of life and overall well-being. The concept of livelihood encompasses the capabilities, assets, resources, and activities that individuals utilize to earn a living and meet their basic needs. According to the UNDP (2022), sustainable livelihoods enable individuals to cope with economic shocks, improve their living conditions, and contribute meaningfully to community development. For women migrants in West Africa, livelihood development is particularly important because migration is often motivated by the search for improved economic opportunities, employment, and financial security. Despite the opportunities associated with migration, many women migrants face significant challenges in accessing decent work and sustainable income sources. Factors such as limited education, inadequate vocational skills, language barriers, discrimination, and legal restrictions often confine them to low-paying and insecure jobs within the informal sector. Consequently, adult education has emerged as an important strategy for improving livelihood outcomes among women migrants by enhancing their knowledge, skills, competencies, and employability. According to Gary Becker (1964), education and training constitute investments in human capital that increase productivity and improve economic returns. Human Capital Theory suggests that individuals who acquire relevant skills and knowledge are more likely to secure employment, generate income, and achieve economic advancement. Within the context of

migration, adult education provides women migrants with the competencies necessary to overcome labor market barriers and improve their socioeconomic conditions.

Employment Generation: One of the most significant contributions of adult education to livelihood development is its role in enhancing employment opportunities. Employment provides migrants with financial resources, social security, and opportunities for social participation. However, many women migrants encounter difficulties securing formal employment because they lack the qualifications and competencies required by employers. Adult education programmes address this challenge by providing literacy education, vocational training, language instruction, and employability skills that increase labor market competitiveness. According to the International Labour Organization (2022), skills development programmes significantly improve employment outcomes among vulnerable populations, including migrants and women. Through adult learning opportunities, women migrants acquire practical competencies that enhance their ability to secure gainful employment and improve their working conditions.

Entrepreneurship Development: Entrepreneurship represents another important pathway through which adult education promotes livelihood development among women migrants. Entrepreneurship involves the identification of opportunities and the creation of economic activities that generate income and employment. In many West African countries, women migrants engage in small-scale businesses such as trading, food processing, tailoring, hairdressing, handicrafts, and agricultural enterprises. Adult education programmes provide entrepreneurial competencies such as business planning, marketing, financial management, customer relations, and innovation. According to the UNESCO (2022), entrepreneurship education strengthens individuals' capacity to establish and sustain income-generating ventures. These competencies enable women migrants to move beyond subsistence activities and develop viable businesses that contribute to economic growth and household welfare.

Income generation is fundamental to the attainment of sustainable livelihoods. Adequate income enables individuals to meet their basic needs, access healthcare, provide education for their children, and improve their overall quality of life. However, women migrants frequently experience income insecurity due to unstable employment and limited access to productive resources. Adult education contributes to income generation by enhancing productivity, improving occupational skills, and expanding economic opportunities. According to the World Bank (2023), investments in skills development and lifelong learning improve earning potential and reduce vulnerability to poverty. Through vocational training and financial literacy education, women migrants acquire the competencies necessary to increase productivity and maximize income from economic activities. As a result, women migrants are better positioned to achieve financial stability and long-term economic security.

Poverty Reduction and Economic Empowerment: Poverty remains a major challenge affecting many women migrants in West Africa. Limited access to education, employment opportunities, and financial services often contributes to persistent economic deprivation. Adult education serves as a powerful tool for poverty reduction by equipping migrants with capabilities that enhance productivity and income generation. According to the UNDP (2022), education is one of the most effective instruments for reducing poverty and promoting inclusive

development. Adult education empowers women migrants by increasing their access to employment opportunities, entrepreneurial activities, and financial resources. Economic empowerment enables women to exercise greater control over economic decisions, improve household welfare, and participate more actively in community development.

Barriers to Accessing Quality Adult Education among Women Migrants in West Africa

Despite the significant contributions of adult education to social integration and livelihood development, many women migrants in West Africa face considerable barriers that limit their access to quality learning opportunities. Access to adult education is influenced by factors such as availability, affordability, accessibility, relevance, and quality of educational programmes. According to the UNESCO (2022), equitable access to lifelong learning remains a major challenge for vulnerable populations, particularly migrants, women, and individuals with limited educational backgrounds. These barriers often prevent women migrants from acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary for successful integration and economic empowerment.

Institutional Barriers: Institutional barriers refer to structural and administrative challenges within educational systems that hinder participation in adult learning programmes. In many West African countries, adult education programmes specifically designed for migrants are either inadequate or unavailable. Learning centres are often concentrated in urban areas, making access difficult for migrants residing in rural communities, border towns, and informal settlements. According to the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2021), insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructure, shortages of trained facilitators and weak policy implementation continue to constrain the effectiveness of adult education programmes in many developing countries.

Language Barriers: Language differences constitute one of the most significant obstacles to adult education participation among women migrants in West Africa. The region is characterized by linguistic diversity, with English, French, Portuguese, and numerous indigenous languages serving as mediums of communication. Women migrants moving across linguistic boundaries frequently experience difficulties understanding instructional materials and communicating with facilitators. According to Ager and Strang (2008), language proficiency is a critical determinant of integration because it influences access to education, employment, healthcare, and social participation. When adult education programmes are delivered exclusively in the dominant language of the host country, migrants with limited language competence may be excluded from meaningful participation.

Economic Barriers: Economic constraints significantly affect the ability of women migrants to access adult education opportunities. Many women migrants engage in low-paying occupations within the informal sector and often struggle to meet basic household needs. As a result, educational expenses such as transportation costs, registration fees, learning materials, and childcare services may be beyond their financial capacity. The World Bank (2023) notes that poverty remains a major obstacle to educational participation among marginalized populations. In addition, women migrants often prioritize income-generating activities over education because of immediate economic pressures.

Cultural beliefs, gender norms, and societal expectations may also restrict access to adult education among women migrants. In some communities, traditional perceptions regarding women's roles prioritize domestic responsibilities over educational advancement. Such attitudes may discourage women from enrolling in educational programmes or pursuing vocational training opportunities. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2023), gender-based discrimination remains a significant challenge affecting women's access to education and economic opportunities across many parts of Africa. Women migrants may also encounter prejudice and negative stereotypes within host communities, reducing their confidence and willingness to participate in educational activities.

Strategies for Strengthening Adult Education for Women Migrants in West Africa

Legal and administrative challenges frequently hinder access to education among migrant populations. Some women migrants lack official identification documents, residency permits, or other legal requirements needed to access educational services in host countries. Fear of deportation, harassment, or discrimination may further discourage participation in formal learning programmes. The International Organization for Migration (2024) emphasizes that legal insecurity often limits migrants' access to social services, including education and training opportunities. Without adequate legal protection and supportive policies, many women migrants remain excluded from educational programmes that could improve their socioeconomic conditions. Strategies for Strengthening Adult Education for Women Migrants in West Africa. The effectiveness of adult education in promoting social integration and livelihood development among women migrants depends largely on the availability of supportive policies, adequate resources, and inclusive educational practices. Given the numerous challenges confronting women migrants in West Africa, there is a need for deliberate strategies aimed at improving access to quality adult education programmes.

Expansion of Adult Learning Centres and Migrant Resource Centres: One of the most important strategies is the establishment and expansion of Adult Learning Centres and Migrant Resource Centres across border communities, urban centres, and migrant settlements. These centres can serve as accessible platforms for delivering literacy education, vocational training, financial literacy, language instruction, and civic education to women migrants. According to the International Organization for Migration (2024), Migrant Resource Centres play a vital role in providing information, counseling, skills training, and educational support to migrant populations.

Promotion of Multilingual and Culturally Responsive Education: The linguistic diversity of West Africa requires adult education programmes to adopt multilingual approaches that accommodate both migrants and host communities. Educational materials should be developed in languages that are familiar to learners, while facilitators should be trained to deliver instruction in culturally sensitive ways. According to UNESCO (2022), culturally responsive education enhances learner participation, improves comprehension, and promotes social inclusion. Multilingual education can reduce communication barriers and strengthen intercultural understanding among migrants and host populations.

Vocational and entrepreneurship education should be prioritized as key components of adult education programmes for women migrants. Training should focus on market-driven skills such as tailoring, catering, digital entrepreneurship, agro-processing, information technology, handicrafts, and other income-generating activities relevant to local labor markets. The International Labour Organization (2022) emphasizes that skills development programmes improve employability and enhance economic resilience among vulnerable populations. By acquiring practical skills, women migrants can establish sustainable livelihoods and contribute to local economic development.

Conclusion

Migration continues to shape social and economic realities across West Africa, creating both opportunities and challenges for women migrants. While migration offers prospects for improved livelihoods, many women migrants encounter barriers related to language, education, employment, social inclusion, and access to rights. These challenges often hinder successful integration into host communities and limit opportunities for sustainable development. This paper has demonstrated that adult education serves as a critical pathway for addressing these challenges. Women migrants acquire the competencies necessary to participate effectively in social and economic activities. Adult education enhances employability, strengthens entrepreneurship, promotes financial independence, increases awareness of rights, and facilitates meaningful engagement with host communities.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

- Governments in West Africa should integrate adult education into migration management and development policies to support the social and economic integration of women migrants.
- ECOWAS should strengthen regional frameworks that promote access to literacy, vocational, language, financial literacy, and civic education programmes for migrant populations.
- Adult education providers should adopt multilingual and culturally responsive instructional approaches that address the diverse needs of women migrants.
- Governments and development partners should establish and expand Migrant Resource Centres and Adult Learning Centres in border communities and urban areas with high migrant populations.
- Greater investment should be made in vocational and entrepreneurship education to improve employment opportunities and income generation among women migrants.

References

- Aduloju, A. A (2021). ECOWAS and free movement of persons: African women as crossvictims, Bridgewater State University Virtual Commons, 1-25.
- Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(2), 166–191.

Becker, G. S (1993). Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education (3rd ed). Universty of Chicago Press.

Economic Community of West African States Commission. (2020). ECOWAS gender strategic action plan 2020-2030. ECOWAS Commission.

International Organization for Migration. (2024). World Migration Report 2024.

International Labour Organization. (2022). Global Employment Trends Report.

United Nations Development Programme. (2022). Human Development Report.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2022). Global Education Monitoring Report.

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. (2021). Embracing a Culture of Lifelong Learning.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2022). Global Education Monitoring Report.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2023). Women and Migration in Africa: Policy Perspectives.

World Bank. (2023). World Development Report.