

# What difference does literacy make among adult learners? Impact of adult basic education programme in a rural community in Botswana

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## Abstract

Functional education and human development are not mutually exclusive. To achieve an all-round development, the fourth Sustainable Development Goal partly emphasizes the need to ‘... promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ by year 2030. This article, therefore, uses a case study approach to analyse the impact of a government funded adult basic education programme in improving literacy level of Sehitwa community in rural, northwestern Botswana. Using a snowball technique and questionnaire/interview schedule survey to sample and interview 30 adult basic education programme participants and 30 non-participants, respectively, and holding other factors constant, the article’s main thrust was to determine the difference in literacy attainment between the two groups. Results from the *T*-test analysis performed showed that there was a significant difference in participants’ and non-participants’ age, association membership, and household size at  $p \leq 0.00$  level. Nonetheless, there was no significant difference in literacy attainment between the two groups, perhaps as a result of lack of effectiveness and other challenges associated with the implementation of the literacy programme in the study area.

## Keywords

Adult basic education, community, development, lifelong learning, participation, rural

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## **Introduction**

In 2000, the United Nations (UN) and Bretton Woods institutions jointly expressed their commitment to reduce global poverty by 15% in 2015 as one of the ways to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs; Van der Veen & Preece, 2005). Shortly afterwards, the World Bank renewed its interest in the global call to action against poverty, which is to be achieved through various livelihood strategies. The second MDG that aims at achieving universal primary education aligns with the fourth of the 17 goals of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), which emanated from the revised version of the MDGs. A total of 164 countries gathered for the Year 2000 World Economic Forum in Dakar, Senegal, during which member States adopted the Dakar Framework of Action and Education for All (EFA), and agreed upon six wide-ranging education goals targeted for 2015 (UNESCO, n.d.). The fourth SDG aims at achieving quality education and lifelong learning. Thus, adult education is one of the strategies devised to achieve the SDGs. Although adult education is one of the avenues through which poverty could be alleviated, it has not been fully addressed in the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. The Global Monitoring Team on EFA opines that literacy strengthens the capabilities of individuals, families and communities to access health, education, political, economic and cultural opportunities and services (UNESCO, 2002).

The thrust of adult education is mainly about enhancing people's life opportunities. The out-of-school education and training programme emanates from the Adult Basic Education (ABE), which equips people and communities with knowledge and skills to develop their lives. As they recognize the importance of functional literacy in rural livelihoods and people's socio-political-cultural lives, the missionaries were the first to introduce ABE and functional education in Botswana (Nafukho et al., 2005).

Since attaining independence in 1996, Botswana's national development has been largely hinged on universal access to basic education (including adult literacy training), social empowerment, and human rights. Thus, educational policies and programme including the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1977, which was revised in 1994, and the National Literacy Program (NLP) of 1981 were instituted and implemented to achieve this goal (Hanemann, 2014). Several evaluation reports have revealed that the NLP had positive impacts on educational development in Botswana. It is noteworthy to stress that the programme improved access to basic education for the out-of-school groups, leading to increased rates of total youth literacy from 83.3% to 94% and adult literacy from 68% to 83% within the period 1990–2008 (Hanemann, 2014). The most recent World Bank data on national government expenditure on education reveal that the Botswana education sector accounts for approximately 20.5% of the total national budget (World Bank, 2020), which is one of the highest in the world and close to the threshold of 26% required by UNESCO. This reflects well on the government commitment

to enhancing quality education in Botswana, and which many African countries need to emulate.

All things considered, there is a likelihood to reduce poverty through adult basic education programme (ABEP), which is offered by Out of School Education and Training (OSET) – OSET, which commenced in 2009 in Botswana, is an education policy approach designed for the implementation of ABEP. Literacy and ABE are at the heart of lifelong learning. ABE focuses on the acquisition of life skills for every child and adult to enable them to address their social, political and environmental challenges. It also facilitates effective participation in the 21st-Century economy and is essential for achieving socio-economic goals (such as poverty and child mortality reduction), enhancing gender equality, curbing population growth, ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy (UNESCO, 2006). However, the Botswana government institutionalized the non-formal or out-of-school ABEP in 2009 as part of its overall Vision 2016 plan and in line with the recommendations of the Revised NPE (1994) as result of the persistence of youth and adult illiteracy, and their attendant social vices. Acknowledging the complexities associated with the model of multiliteracies now required for contemporary societal needs (see, Holloway & Gouthro, 2020), ABEP strives to offer functional literacy and practical skills to its clients specifically in literacy and numeracy; languages (Setswana and English); general studies; and demand-base, practical and pre-vocational skills training (Hanemann, 2014). The programme is designed for individuals who want to acquire basic literacy skills but cannot enrol in the formal school system. Thus, individuals who could not complete their primary education are targeted because the programme is designed to offer the equivalent of seven years of primary education in the Botswana's primary school system (Hanemann, 2014; Olivier, 1998).

Adult education is basically a lifelong learning experience meant to enhance people's potential in their everyday living. The development of the field was borne out of the need to understand the behaviour of a special group of learners. ABEP, which was officially launched by the OSET at the beginning of 2010 (Udouj et al., 2017), is known locally as *Thuto Ga E Golelwe* (meaning, it is never too late to learn). It is an inclusive, 'integrated, outcome based, modularized and fully accredited lifelong educational and skills training program for out-of-school groups ...' (Hanemann, 2014). These out-of-school groups (characterized as having little literacy and numeracy skills) comprise youth and adults who did not have formal education or dropped out before completing primary school as well as those who failed to access basic education through the NLP.

With the technical support offered by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Botswana developed an ABEP curriculum that meets the basic education training needs of those who missed the opportunities to attend primary education and to offer life skills training. In implementing ABEP, ethnic minorities and people with special learning needs including those in remote rural communities are given priority because '...half of Botswana's population lives in rural areas

with scarce educational opportunities and thus [engendering] the highest poverty, unemployment and illiteracy rates in the country' (Hanemann, 2014).

Throughout Botswana's 10 regions, ABEP is implemented in the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD). The EFA 2015 report for Botswana indicates that there was '... a progressive increase in [adult learners'] enrolments from 7,632 (4,791 females and 2,841 males) at the launch of the program in December 2010 to 12,608 in March 2014' (MoESD, 2015). While the latest World Bank data on literacy rate in Botswana show that the national average for all people aged 15 years above stood at 86.8%, the national average for women stood at approximately 87.5% and 86.1% for males (World Bank, 2020). In Ngamiland East District where Sehithwa is located, literacy went up to over 80% in 2014 (Statistics Botswana and MoESD, 2016). This statistic may, however, not necessarily reflect the realities in all communities in the region, particularly the remotest villages. Despite the government's efforts in putting in place remedial measures to reduce illiteracy in the country, ABEP is riddled with challenges including its failure to address participants' basic needs and interests as well as eradicate youth and adult illiteracy (UNESCO, 2004). Botswana's inability to minimize illiteracy as envisaged was caused by several factors including lack of resources and high dropout rates. Major factors influencing adult learners' withdrawal include the programme itself, economic considerations, and psychosocial factors (Omoding-Okwalinga, 1994). Maruatona (2002) observes that 'the exclusive use of Setswana for minority communities caused a conflict between their life experiences, culture and literacy expectations' resulting in participants' dropouts among non-Setswana speakers (Hanemann, 2014). Perhaps this may have been exacerbated by the low number of teachers who also have low educational qualifications. Thus, the running of adult literacy classes has been hindered by the poor programme implementation. Consequently, several scholars observe that adult education and training programme have failed to achieve the objective of increasing adults' literacy skills or job opportunities in Botswana (Mikulecky, 1992). Although the original conceptualization of Botswana's ABEP bears semblance with the multiliteracies model, its implementation has not been fully achieved as a result of many challenges associated with the programme.

The integration of OSET with other educational sectors has resulted in the negligence of OSET programme. The incorporation of all educational sectors under one ministry was meant to reduce illiteracy at all levels but this somehow appears to be bedeviled with bureaucratic bottlenecks and lack of focus. These shortcomings and a myriad of other personal and socio-political-cultural factors have engendered a high discontinuance rate of adult literacy participants and their unwillingness to participate in the programme. Despite government interventions and implementation of the programme to boost ABE and functional literacy, many people in Botswana thus remain non-literate and poor, especially in the rural areas. The article, therefore, addresses the question of whether adult education has impacted people's socio-economic and cultural lives in Sehithwa village, Botswana.

## Theoretical framework

While Knowles' concept of 'andragogy' is deemed appropriate in understanding adult literacy learners and their viewpoints on participation in literacy programmes, critical social theory offers understanding on the significance of any literacy programme in a learner's life, and how far the programme has responded to their needs. Knowles (1980, p. 43) originally defines andragogy as 'the art and science of helping adults learn' and contrasts it with pedagogy, which is concerned with helping children to learn. Andragogy is premised on some crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from those of child learners, which govern traditional pedagogy (Knowles, 1980). The first assumption implies that adults mature from dependency to self-directedness; they independently seek the reason(s) for wanting to learn something. In other words, there should be a reason for an adult to want to learn and whether what is learnt is applicable and beneficial to their everyday life. The second assumption suggests that an adult foundation is based on experiential learning; they connect their past experiences with their current knowledge-base and activities. This scenario sync with the multi-literacies framework, which pays attention to the learning process in relation to learners' prior knowledge and their previous life experiences (Holloway & Gouthro, 2020). The third implies that adult learners exhibit the readiness to learn when they feel that there is a need to do so to enable them to cope favourably well with any emerging real-life challenges. Adults are most interested in learning subjects having immediate relevance to their work and/or personal lives. This implies that adult learning is problem-centred rather than content-oriented. The fourth assumption is that adult learners are self-oriented; they seek the competence that will enhance their personal development, which the realization of their full potential. The fifth assumption suggests that adults can learn new things, regardless of their age. This implies that the ability of individuals to learn is not confined to certain age limit. The sixth assumption implies that adults respond better to internal stimuli than external ones; they are self-driven because they respond better to intrinsic motivators than those that are extrinsic. And the seventh assumption suggests that there are certain conditions of learning and principles of teaching that enhance learners' growth and personal development than others. This implies that the quality of the teaching-learning environment mainly determines the extent to which adult learning objectives are achieved.

While it may be an uphill task to maintain a sharp contrast between andragogy and pedagogy (Cross, 1981), Knowles (1980) opines that andragogy transcends mere helping adults to learn. Attempting to provide an alternative for the traditional pedagogical learning mode, Knowles' use of subtitles such as 'Farewell to Pedagogy' (1970, p. 37) and 'The Millstone of Pedagogy' (1973, p. 42) suggests that the mode of teaching in the context of both children and adult education should transition from pedagogy to andragogy. Nonetheless, Knowles' standpoint on the appropriateness of the use of teaching and learning theories appears unclear in some places; he seems to be pushing for a case by case application of either

pedagogical or andragogical strategies within a given context as long as the theoretical assumptions are pragmatic enough. He argues that ‘... whenever a pedagogical assumption is the realistic one, then pedagogical strategies are appropriate, regardless of the age of the learner – and vice versa’ (Knowles, 1980, p. 43).

Andragogy is a widely accepted philosophical and theoretical notion guiding the instruction of adult learners (Kelly, 2013). The applicability of andragogical theory in this article is roundly appropriate because it focuses on the characteristics of adult learners, illustrating how they learn, their perspectives toward learning and their motivation for learning (Knowles, 1980). The learner’s experience is a fundamental component of adult education. It is noted that proactive learners who take the initiative in learning retain more information, as opposed to reactive, passive learners. In contrast to reactive learners, proactive learners embark on the learning process with great purpose and motivation, and they practicalize their learning experiences (Knowles, 2013). In adult education classes, learners’ experiences count for as much as the facilitator’s knowledge (Knowles, 1973). Once adults discover that they can take responsibility for their own learning, they experience a sense of release and excitement, and enter learning with deep ego involvement (Knowles, 1970).

In the end, adult learners need to transcend beyond being passive receiver of knowledge to having the motivation to acquire new literacy skills (Knowles, 1980). All things considered, those who advertently find their way back to school after abruptly discontinuing with it will most likely have more motivation to learn because of the opportunities and ability they have to relate activities and discussions from the learning environment to their personal lives (see, McGrath, 2009). Adults would embrace the learning environment more readily if they had awareness for having new skills and an interest to participate in learning activities (McGrath, 2009).

Adult learners play diverse roles in their daily lives (Kelly, 2013). A theoretical base, which interrogates people’s social life, is needed to unearth in-depth issues surrounding adult learning. Doing so will enhance the understanding of the context in which literacy activities take place (Jennings, 1990). Vygotsky’s (1962) social constructivist theory, therefore, finds relevance in this article. Constructivism draws on the developmental work of Piaget (1977). Contrary to the constructivist views of Piaget (1977), which on the one hand, emphasizes more on the mental processes of the individual than the context in which the individual learns, Vygotsky (1978; see also, Forman & Kraker, 1985), on the other hand, pays more attention to social and cultural factors associated with children’s cognitive development and learning. Given the thrust of constructivism, it is inferred that the emphasis on social processes and contexts (Thompson, 2002) makes this theory suitable for studying adult learners whose learning is shaped by the social contexts in which literacy is applied. From the social constructivist perspective, ‘... as people develop and mature, they build a frame of reference that acts as a perpetual filter through which they observe experiences and evaluate events’ (Gravett, 2005, p. 14). Thus, it is worth noting that experiences of adult learners determine the

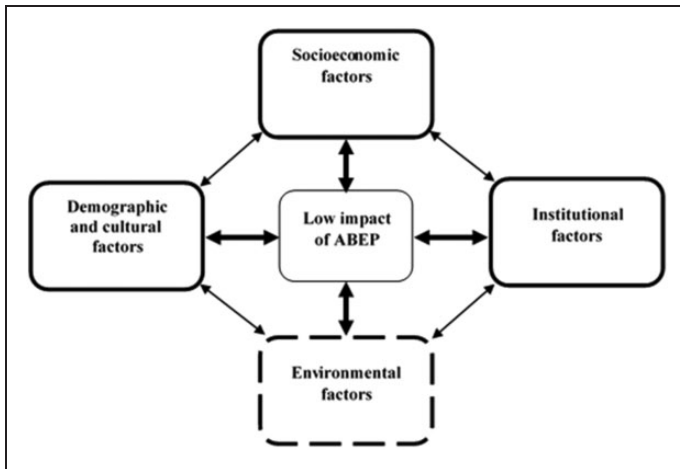


reasons for their participation in literacy programmes. While some individuals recognize literacy as an imperative for acquiring skills in business and an avenue through which they could improve their lives, others simply acknowledge the importance of literacy in socio-economic development (Oluoch, 2005).

That said, social constructivists do emphasize the social dimension of learning, which stresses that adults learn through social interaction and collaboration (Gravett, 2005). Furthering her standpoint, Gravett (2005, p. 21) claims that, '... the meaning making activities of the individual do not take place in isolation, [but] instead are shaped by the context, culture and tools in the learning situation'. Vygotsky (1978) underscores the role of language, dialogue and shared understanding as elements of culture that shape the learning situation. Premised on a dynamic culture [as against pedagogy that is premised on a static culture], andragogy offers learners the opportunity to learn from the 'known to the unknown' (Kabuga, 1977, p. 251), which in the end, privileges the adult learner characteristics of self-concept, experience, time perspective, etc., and which in turn enable people to become fully functional and realize their full potentials (Kabuga, 1977; Knowles, 1980). As part of the transformations occurring in African universities where andragogy is now being taught as a mainstream course in adult and continuing education (Lekoko et al., n.d.), this educational debate finds relevance in mainstreaming and application of local knowledge in Africa's education as against the (in)appropriateness or misapplication of Western education contents and techniques (see, Kabuga, 1977; Kolawole, 2005).

Based on social constructivist perspective, adults have reasons why they engage in literacy activities and their literacy is situation or context specific. Rogers (2001) stresses that adults participate in literacy programmes in anticipation that by doing so, they would satisfy their felt needs. Barton and Hamilton (2000) believe that people's engagement in literacy activities is purposeful, socially and culturally embedded; learners use literacy to achieve some personal goals. It is within this context, therefore, that this article attempts to investigate learners' standpoints on the importance of the literacy programme in relation to their all-round development.

The conceptual model of this study demonstrates the factors that influence people's participation or non-participation in adult literacy programmes (Figure 1). The model shows the interrelationships between factors and how they shape the impact of ABEP. This article considers a few of the myriads of factors impeding or enhancing ABEP. These include demographic, cultural, socio-economic and institutional factors. Specifically, demographic and cultural factors (such as age, marital status, sex and ethnicity, cultural and religious festivities, community demands such as funeral rites, weddings, etc.) may have a strong influence on how people explore opportunities offered by ABEP to enhance their status. For example, senility could make people lethargic and might affect their willingness to participate in any adult class instructions. While marital commitment may affect how a married individual would commit to ABEP participation (Kolawole, 2009, 2011). Different ethnic groups perceive and read meaning to the phenomenon around them differently. Socio-economic issues (e.g. livelihood activities) might increase the chances of poor or non-participation in ABEP; people who do not have any veritable sources



**Figure 1.** A conceptual framework showing factors shaping the impact of adult basic education programmes.

of income might perceive literacy initiatives as time-wasting and would instead devote most of their time seeking for means of economic survival. Among others, institutional factors particularly those bordering on government bad policies on programme implementation and poor infrastructures could hamper people's participation in ABEP. Although having a partial overlap with institutional factors, environmental factors are not rigorously investigated in this article.

## Methodology

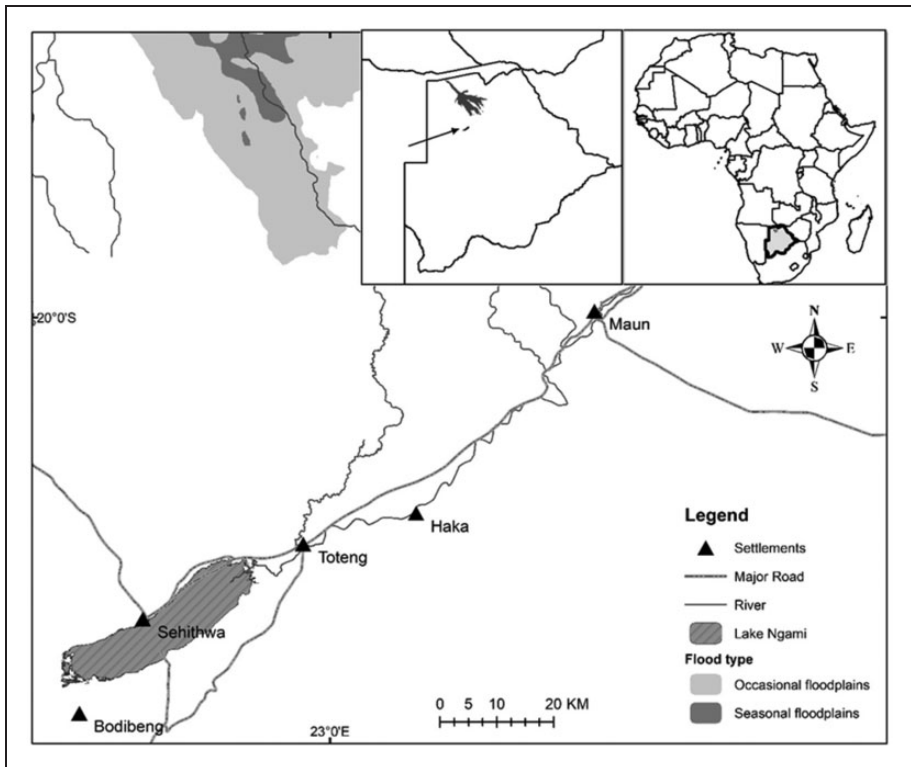
### Study area

The study site (Sehithwa village) is situated in North-West District of Botswana. It is in the southern part of Maun and on the fringes of Lake Ngami (Figure 2). Its geographic coordinates are Latitudes  $20^{\circ}$  and  $27' 59.99''$  South of the Equator, and Longitudes  $22^{\circ} 42'$  and  $59.99''$  East of the Greenwich Meridian (Tlou, 1971). Sehithwa was originally known as Tjihitwa, and was a place where people used to gather for meetings. It has a population of approximately 1614 people. While the Batawana, Bakgalagadi and Ovabanderu were the first to reside in the village, it is predominantly populated by the Herero people who constitute the main ethnic group whose way of life is characterized by itinerant, pastoral farming. The major languages spoken are Setswana and Herero.

### Sampling and sample size

A combination of both purposive sampling and snowball techniques were used to select 30 ABEP participants and 30 non-participants in the study area. Snowballing





**Figure 2.** A map of the Okavango Delta showing the location of Sehithwa community (Courtesy of Ms. Tsaone Goikantswemang, ORI GIS Lab).

was used to identify and interview participants and non-participants. Snowballing entails relying on an individual or a group of individuals to recommend other potential participants for a study or seek their help to directly recruit them for the study.

### *Instrumentation and measurement of variables*

This case study research used a mixed-methods approach comprising both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Thus, data were collected using questionnaire for adult learners while a semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect information from non-participants. Interview schedules were used to elicit information from non-literate individuals from whom the field enumerators would ask questions and then complete the instrument themselves.

To ensure both content validity and reliability of the instrument (Weiner, 2005), a pilot study (test–retest procedure) was carried out on two occasions among the same set of respondents within a community homogenous to Sehithwa to test the instruments' validity and reliability. While validity refers to the extent to which an

instrument measures what it is intended to measure, reliability measures the instrument's consistency in terms of its ability to collect the same set of information on different occasions. The instrument was adjudged adequate because people's responses during the first occasion were almost similar to the second.

Factors such as age, gender, number of people living under the same roof, ethnic group, level of education, marital status, religion, amount earned per month, means of livelihood, *cosmopolitaness*, etc. were all measured. Demographic and socio-economic variables were either coded or quantitatively measured, accordingly. While categorical variables were coded, non-categorical variables were quantified. For instance, sex was coded as male (0) and female (1). Marital status was coded as single (1), married (2), separated (3) and divorced (4). Ethnicity was coded, accordingly. Quantitative variables were scored. For example, age was measured by the number of years an individual has lived on earth. Education level was measured by the number of years spent in formal education or non-formal education. Family size was measured by the number of people living and eating together under the same roof. *Cosmopolitaness* (which is the degree of external orientation of an individual) was measured by the frequency of travels outside an individual's immediate environment and for a specified purpose. Association membership was measured by the number of societies to which an individual belonged as well as the position they held. Institutional factors, such as government policy and infrastructures were each measured through a set of at least eight items/statements placed on a 5-point Likert rating scale of strongly agree (5 points) to strongly disagreed (1 point). The dependent variable (*Y*), which is the respondents' perceived improvement in socio-economic and cultural wellbeing (encompassing income improvement, environmental awareness, political participation, etc.) was also measured through a set of at least eight items/statements placed on a 5-point Likert scale.

### **Data collection and analysis**

The questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect both categorical and non-categorical, numeric and qualitative data. Focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews were conducted to collect in-depth information from ABEP participants and non-participants. Quantitative data were summarized using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages, charts, and measures of central tendency (e.g., mean) and dispersion (e.g., standard deviation). Also, Student's-*T* (*T*-test) was used to determine the differences in the means of selected variables common to the two groups of respondents.

## **Results and discussions**

### **Demographic attributes of ABEP participants and non-participants**

The article compares two groups which are ABEP participants and non-participants to determine whether there was any significant difference between

those who participated in adult literacy programme and those who did not. The demographic analyses of participants are presented in this section (Table 1). The average age of ABEP participants and non-participants was 58 ( $SD = 12.19$ ) and 48 ( $SD = 15.46$ ), respectively. Results on ABEP participants reveal that 16.7% of them aged between 34 and 46 years and 56.7% were 47 and 65 years of age. Participants who aged above 66 years accounted 26% of the sample. However, analysis shows that while 26.7% of the non-participants aged between 34 and 46 years, 26.7% aged between 47 and 65 years. However, 30% of the

**Table 1.** Demographic variables of participants and non-participants.

Variable	Participants		Non-participants		Measurement of central tendency
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
<b>Age</b>					
<33 years	–	–	8	26.7	$M1 = 57.9$
34–46 years	5	16.7	8	26.7	$SD1 = 12.19$
47–65 years	17	56.7	9	30.0	$M2 = 48.0333$
66 and above	8	26.7	5	16.7	$SD2 = 15.46$
Total	30	100.0	30	100.0	
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	28	93.3	18	60.0	
Male	2	6.7	12	40.0	
Total	30	100.0	30	100.0	
<b>Marital status</b>					
Married	5	16.7	–	–	
Single	16	53.3	20	66.7	
Cohabiting	5	16.7	9	30.0	
Widowed	3	10.0	1	3.3	
Divorced	1	3.3	–	–	
Total	30	100.00	30	100.0	
<b>Ethnicity</b>					
Bayei	5	16.7	7	23.3	
Baherero	16	53.3	2	6.7	
Basarwa	5	16.7	6	20.0	
Bambukushu	3	10.0	2	6.7	
Batawana	1	3.3	3	10.0	
Other	10	33.3	10	33.3	
Total	30	100.0	30	100.0	
<b>Religion</b>					
Christianity	29	96.7	27	90.9	
Traditional religion	1	3.3	1	3.3	
Trado-Christianity	–	–	2	6.7	
Total	30	100.0	30	100.0	

Source: Field survey (2017).

non-participants were 66 years and above. The findings also reveal that most ABEP participants were females (93.3%). It is noteworthy that the psychosocial and cultural complexities associated with the Batswana society may have been implicated in the disproportionate number of male and female participants in ABEP. This finding characterizes the features of most adult literacy programmes in Africa. As observed by Oluoch (2005), most males refrain from participating in adult literacy programme due to the fear of being perceived as 'illiterate'. Also, Muiro and Mukuria (2005) observed that there are dominant traditional attitudes that prevent men from taking part in these programmes. This observation agrees with the viewpoints of Ellis (2000) and Kweka and Namene's (1999) who opine that gender disparity has constituted a major impediment to the implementation of ABEP. Statistics Botswana indicates that there were 1,035,947 females and 988,957 males in the country during the 2011 census (Statistics Botswana, 2011). The results of a *T*-test analysis conducted show there was a significant difference in the age ( $t = -2.77$ ;  $p \leq 0.01$ ) of both participants and non-participants of ABEP.

However, while a higher percentage (53.3%) of respondents were single, 16.7% of participants were married. Also, 16.7% of them cohabited while 3.3% were divorced. The respondents who were widowed accounted for 10% of the sample. The Baherero constituted the majority (53.3%) of participants due to the geographical location of Sehitwa while only 6.7% of the non-participants belonged to the same ethnic group. Also, 23.3% of the non-participants belonged to the Bayei ethnic group while the participants constituted only 16.7% of the group. About 33.3% of participants and non-participants constituted other ethnic groups. While 96.7% of the respondents were Christians, traditional religionists constituted 3.3% and none of them belonged to the Trado-Christianity faith. A total of 90% of non-participants were Christians while 6.7% were Trado-Christians. Only 3.3% of them were purely traditional believers.

### *Socio-economic attributes of ABEP participants and non-participants*

Analyses on ABEP participants and non-participants' socioeconomics are presented in Table 2. Results reveal that participants and non-participants who had primary education both constituted 66.7% apiece of the sampled population. Most participants and non-participants opined that many of them dropped out of formal education at primary level due to poverty, long distance to school, low self-esteem, etc. Elsewhere, it has been noted that lack of adequate resources, poverty, HIV/AIDS, lack of a conducive learning environment and lack of recognition of the proficiency certificates obtained in literacy programmes are the causes of dropouts and withdrawal from adult literacy classes (Muiro & Mukuria, 2005; Oluoch, 2005). Respondents in both groups who travelled a few times constituted only 40% of the sampled population. Travelling outside Sehitwa village to other places such as Maun was engendered by the need to go to the banks, engage in job hunting and shopping. Other reasons included attending funerals, weddings and engaging in other socio-economic and cultural activities. In terms of

**Table 2.** Socio-economic variables of participants and non-participants.

Variable	Participants		Non-participants		Measures of central tendency
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Education					
Primary	20	66.7	20	66.7	
Secondary	–	–	5	16.7	
Never been to school	10	33.3	5	16.7	
Total	30	100.0	30	100.0	
Travel frequency					
Once a year	7	23.3	6	20.0	
More than twice	1	3.3	9	30.0	
A few times	12	40.0	12	40.0	
Never travelled	7	23.3	1	3.3	
Rarely travelled	3	10.0	2	6.7	
Total	30	100.0	30	100.0	
Means of livelihood					
None	7	23.3	11	36.7	
Public service	10	33.3	8	26.7	
Business	1	3.3	2	6.7	
Farming	3	10.0	6	20.0	
Street vending	1	3.3	1	3.3	
Both farming and public service	4	13.3	–	–	
Old age pension	3	10.0	2	6.7	
Both business and farming	1	3.3	–	–	
Total	30	100.0	30	100.0	
Amount earned per month					
None	9	30.0	12	40.0	MI = 311.33
Less than 100	1	3.3	2	6.7	SDI = 262.7252

(continued)

Table 2. Continued.

Variable	Participants		Non-participants		Measures of central tendency
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
100-300	1	3.3	3	10.0	M2 = 421.4000
301-500	7	23.3	2	6.7	SD2 = 586.09353
501-750	11	36.7	8	26.7	
Above 100	1	3.3	3	10.0	
Total	30	100.0	30	100.0	
Engagement in work					
Yes	17	56.7	15	50.0	
No	13	43.3	15	50.0	
Total	30	100.0	30	100.0	
Number of association and role					
None	15	50.0	21	70.0	
Ordinary member	15	50.0	9	30.0	
Officer	-	-	-	-	
Total	30	100.0	30	100.0	
Household size					
1-5	11	36.7	16	53.3	M1 = 7.700
6-10	14	46.7	11	36.7	SD1 = 6.433
11-15	3	10.0	3	10.0	M2 = 5.700
16-20	1	3.3	-	-	SD2 = 3.706
20 and Above	1	3.3	-	-	
Total	30	100.0	30	100.0	

Source: Field survey (2017).

livelihoods, while 23.3% of ABEP participants indicated that they did not earn a living, 33.3% of them worked in the public service. Whereas 3.3% of them were involved in non-agricultural businesses, 10% engaged in farming. While those who engaged in both farming and public service were 13.3%, those who earned money through old age pension constituted 10% and only 3.3% of them engaged in farming. Results also indicate that while 36.7% of non-participants did not earn a living, 26% engaged in public service and 6.7% of them engaged in private business activities. Also, 20% constituted those who were involved in farming. In sum, most participants (56.7%) and 50% of non-participants had jobs. ABEP participants who belonged to associations constituted 50% of those who were ordinary members in their societies while 30% of non-participants belonged to at least one association. However, all of them had the status of an ordinary member in their respective associations. None of the respondents in both categories was an officer. The results of *T*-test analysis show there was a significant difference in association membership ( $t = -5.21$ ;  $p \leq 0.00$ ) of both participants and non-participants of ABEP. This partly buttresses Kolawole's (2009) findings who reported that 80% of adult literacy participants who were involved in community development projects belonged to at least one association. The average monthly income earned by ABEP participants was Botswana Pula (BWP) 311.33 (SD = 262.73) while that of non-participants was BWP 421.40 (SD = 586.093). The results of *T*-test analysis show that there was no significant difference in the income earned per month ( $t = -0.39$ ;  $p \geq 0.70$ ). This suggests that the ABEP programme may not have significantly contributed to the enhancement of people's income in the study area. The analysis on household size distribution of both ABEP participants and non-participants (Table 2) showed that the average number of participants living under the same roof was eight people with a standard deviation of 6.43 while the average for non-participants was six people with a standard deviation of 3.71. The majority of ABEP participants indicated that approximately 47% of them lived in a household of between 6 and 10 members while about 37% belonged to a household having between 1 and 5 members. While 10% of participants had between 11 and 15 household members, 3.3% had 16–20 members. Those having 20 members and above only constituted 3.3%. While 53.3% of non-participants had between 1 and 5 household members, roughly 37% had between 6 and 10. Also, 10% of them had between 11 and 15 members. Results of *T*-test analysis showed that there was a significant difference between participants and non-participants' household size ( $t = 2.22$ ;  $p \leq 0.03$ ). This difference may have arisen because ABEP participants had a skewed, larger household sizes than the non-participants, which of course cannot be associated with family commitment and participation in adult literacy class.

### *Institutional roles in literacy attainment*

Results show the perceived institutional factors driving literacy attainment by rural people in Sehithwa (Table 3). Most of the participants (56.6%) either strongly



**Table 3.** Government policy driving the attainment of literacy.

Statement	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Total(%)
I. Government policy provides enough support for ABEP	3 (10.0)	2 (6.7)	8 (26.7)	10 (33.3)	7 (23.3)	30 (100.0)
II. Government provides the necessary framework for ABEP participants to access learning facilities	2 (6.7)	8 (26.7)	2 (6.7)	13 (43.3)	5 (16.7)	30 (100.0)
III. Government provides good support for the implementation ABEP and advertising	–	2 (6.7)	2 (6.7)	–	26 (86.7)	30 (100.0)
IV. Government gives opportunities to other institutions like NGO's to assist in the programme	23 (76.7)	4 (13.3)	1 (3.3)	1 (3.3)	1 (3.3)	30 (100.0)
V. Government provides training for facilitators to give ABEP participants good outcomes	–	2 (6.7)	1 (3.3)	2 (6.7)	25 (83.3)	30 (100)
VI. Government is giving funds to provide for the materials used for literacy attainment	5 (16.7)	11 (36.7)	1 (3.3)	8 (26.7)	5 (16.7)	30 (100.0)
VII. Government policies provide a good direction for the programme	–	1 (3.3)	–	22 (73.3)	7 (23.3)	30 (100.0)
VIII. Government makes adequate provisions for teachers in terms of good salaries and trainings	–	1 (3.3)	25 (83.3)	3 (10.0)	1 (3.3)	30 (100.0)

Source: Field survey (2017).

Percentages are in parenthesis ( ).

agreed or agreed that '[g]overnment policy provides enough support for ABEP' while 16.7% strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement. While most participants (60%) either strongly agreed or agreed that '[g]overnment provides the necessary framework for ABEP participants to access learning facilities', only 33.4% strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement. While most participants (86.7%) strongly agreed that '[g]overnment provides good support for the implementation of ABEP and advertising', 6.7% of them disagreed. Whereas most participants (90%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed that '[g]overnment gives opportunities to other institutions like NGO's to assist in the program', 6.6% either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. While most participants (90%) either strongly agreed or agreed that '[g]overnment provides training for facilitators to give ABEP participants good outcomes', only 6.7% disagreed. Whereas most participants (53.4%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed that '[g]overnment is giving funds to provide for the materials used for literacy attainment', 43.4% either strongly agreed or agreed that government provides funds for acquiring teaching materials. While most participants (96.6%) either strongly agreed or agreed that '[g]overnment policies provide a good direction for the program', only 3.3% had a different viewpoint.

### *Infrastructure and literacy attainment*

The perceptions of ABEP participants about the effect of infrastructural facilities on their literacy attainment are presented in this subsection (Table 4). A large proportion of the participants (66.7%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed that '[g]overnment provides conducive classrooms for learning'. While a majority (86.7%) of the participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed that '[g]overnment has provided good roads to access the learning center', 13.3% agreed with the statement. While most (83.3%) of the participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed with that '[a]ccess roads to the learning center are in good conditions', a total of 16.7% of the participants either strongly agreed or agreed. Many (60%) participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed that '[g]overnment provides access to safe drinking water at the learning center', while 40% of them either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. While most (90.0%) participants either strongly agreed or agreed that '[t]he learning center is proximal to both teachers and learners', only 10% strongly disagreed or disagreed with the impression of learning centre proximity. All the respondents (100%) strongly agreed or agreed that '[g]overnment provides adequate access to easy communication for teachers and learners'. Most (93%) of the participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed that '[g]overnment has provided electricity for good lightings in the classrooms', whereas 6.7% strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. Also, most participants (83.4%) either strongly agreed or agreed that '[g]overnment provides comfortable chairs and tables for learning' while 13.4% either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the notion. FGD findings indicate that while the government assisted in the implementation of the programme, its efforts were not enough or visible. Also, another concern was

**Table 4.** Infrastructure driving the attainment of literacy.

Statement	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Total (%)
I. Government provides conducive classrooms for learning	17 (56.7)	3 (10.0)	–	20 (66.7)	–	30 (100.0)
II. Government has provided good roads to access the learning centre	20 (66.7)	6 (20.0)	–	4 (13.33%)	–	30 (100.0)
III. Access roads to the learning centre are in good conditions	18 (60.0)	7 (23.3)	–	4 (13.4)	1 (3.3)	30 (100.0)
IV. Government provides access to safe drinking water at the learning centre	1 (3.3)	17 (56.7)	–	5 (16.7)	7 (23.3)	30 (100.0)
V. The learning centre is proximal to both teachers and learners	–	3 (10.0)	–	13 (43.3)	14 (46.7)	30 (100.0)
VI. Government provides adequate access to easy communication for teachers and learners	–	–	–	2 (6.7)	28 (93.3)	30 (100.0)
VII. Government has provided electricity for good lightings in the classrooms	25 (83.3)	3 (10.0)	–	–	2 (6.7)	30 (100.0)
VIII. Government provides comfortable tables and chairs for learning	2 (6.7)	2 (6.7)	1 (3.3)	17 (56.7)	8 (26.7)	30 (100.0)

Source: Field survey (2017).

Percentages are in parenthesis ( ).

that the government seemed to have neglected the programme in the rural areas. One of the ABEP participants remarks thus:

It is really hurting to see adults being taught under trees or in abandoned structures like what we have in Sehithwa. When it is cold, raining or sunny, they stop from going to school. For basic education to be achieved, government needs to revisit some of these concerns and do something about them because we need ABEP so as to give a second chance to all those who missed the opportunity to attend formal schooling or dropped out of school.

### *Relevance of ABEP and its associated implementation challenges*

Results show that most (70%) participants indicated that the programme was relevant to their socio-economic wellbeing. While participants who could read and those who could not constituted 33% apiece of the respondents, 27% and 7% of them had medium- and high-level proficiency in reading, respectively. Also, 43% had a minimal writing skill while 23% could not write at all. Participants who had medium- and high-level proficiency in writing constituted only 27% and 7% of the respondents, respectively. Further analysis shows that some participants were still relatively new entrants in ABEP while others had been attending phased literacy classes for over a period of 4–6 months or more. This probably explains the variations in the level of reading and writing skills acquired by participants. However, some key informants among the ABEP participants stated that they had acquired reading and writing skills through the programme and had gained self-confidence. Further investigations reveal that learners acquired reading and writing skills within an average period of 2–4 months depending on the entry point; participants who had attended primary school education but could not complete it learn faster than those who had not attended any formal education. Nonetheless, the findings probably suggest that voluntary, adult learners in general learn faster when they have self-motivation to do so. Buttressing the role of ABEP in their everyday needs, some of the participants put this way:

I can now write my name in full when filling important documents and applying for residential plots or jobs. I can also identify all the alphabets when my children at home ask me to read alphabets with them. (Participant 1)

Farmers are now able to know the appropriate fertilizers and best seeds to use, and which compost could be used on their farmland . . . this program has enhanced our ability to write with our hands, but previously we used fingerprints to sign. (Participant 2)

When we go to the clinic, we can read books and pamphlets. When they give us dates to come for check-ups at the hospitals, we can read and find out when we are

supposed to go back to the hospital. We are also able to see how many times to use the medication per day. (Participant 3)

Before I joined this program, I used to notice that our environment was always littered with garbage. But the situation has changed after the commencement of the adult class; participants now seem to have the awareness about their personal and environmental hygiene ... (Participant 4)

The standpoints of the participants as reflected in their feedbacks above show the multidimensional functionality of ABEP beyond mere reading and writing; its pervasive significance in the psychosocial, economic and environmental conditions of the adult learners resonates in their voices. In furtherance to the foregoing, a female member of the Village Development Committee (VDC) who was not an ABEP participant, and who took part in one of the FGDs commented thus:

ABEP has helped participants to become critical thinkers; they apply what they learn in their everyday lives. Some have developed ideas of selling. It has boosted their confidence in taking part in community developments activities and they feel valued and respected.

Although low self-esteem, loss of interest in schooling and other reasons were the causes of lack of participation in ABEP, 77% of non-participants indicated that they had a desire to participate in the programme because they inadvertently discontinued primary school education and wanted to develop their literacy skills, improve their living standards and enhance their status. These viewpoints find relevance in social constructivism, which posits that adults have reasons why they engage in literacy activities including an anticipation to satisfy their felt needs (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Rogers, 2001; Vygotsky, 1962 ).

However, the *T*-test analysis conducted show that there was no significant difference in the impact which ABEP had on literacy attainment ( $t = 0.12$ ;  $p \geq 0.91$ ) of both participants and non-participants. While a half of the respondents (50%) affirmed that personal and socio-economic demands on learners were a challenge, 26.7% of them felt the combination of both inadequate reading and writing materials, and personal and socio-economic demands constituted a major barrier. About 17% of the participants identified other challenges including poor eyesight, low self-esteem, sickness, family demands, etc. Nonetheless, high rates of dropouts have been attributed to inadequate time due to other social responsibilities and the irrelevance of curriculum to learners' needs (Omoding-Okwalinga, 1994). Elsewhere in southwestern Nigeria, Kolawole (2009) identified challenges including dearth of reading and writing materials, short time allotted to literacy classes, unavailability of qualified teachers, low turnout of participants arising from socio-cultural and personal demands, inappropriate curriculum and poor implementation of literacy programmes. As observed by Lind and Johnson (1990), time allocated for classes is not adequate as against the amount required by adults

who generally need more time to complete their literacy classes. In addition, Kolawole (2012) also found teachers' apathy engendered by poor incentives as a major impediment to ABEP implementation in northern Nigeria. The results of FGDs indicated that the implementation of ABEP in Sehitwa is sub-standard due to poor management of the programme. Inadequate classrooms, apathy and lack of reading and writing materials are a setback in the implementation of the programme. One adult learner remarks:

Lack of resources is a challenge to us because the classroom is too small, and the ceiling is smelling because of bat droppings. As you can see, the ceiling will one day fall on us. We do not feel safe in this classroom. Moreover, the room does not have electricity and when writing in a white paper our eyes are strained because many of us are already aging... (An ABEP participant)

The above scenario is typical of the situation in sub-Saharan Africa where poor infrastructures serve as one of the major impediments to achieving quality education including both formal and informal learning (see, Maara, 2012; Walters, 1999).

In terms of the progress made in the implementation of ABEP, some non-participants but prominent members of the village observe thus:

The implementation of ABEP in our community is making a slow progress because people are too lazy to attend adult school. They would rather spend more time in shebeens [liquor bars] than attend classes. And as an elder and a chief in Sehitwa, I do not condone this behavior. Only a few people are serious about attending adult literacy lessons. (Sehitwa Chief)

I think ABEP implementation is not going well because the participants lack facilities and classes. They, therefore, get discouraged to regularly attend school. This also makes non-participants to be not eager to enroll in ABEP as they are not motivated to do so. However, some non-participants are still eager to learn how to read and write; there are other activities, which allow ABEP participants to interact with other people outside Sehitwa. (A VDC woman)

Well, the implementation of ABEP is too slow. But there are also examinations meant to test the participants' progression in what they are learning which is good for the development of the learners and the program because at the end they are awarded with a Standard 7 Certificate, which gives them progression to upper levels of education like formal schools and BOCODOL. (Social worker)

## Summary and conclusions

The article determined the effect of ABEP on rural community's literacy attainment. By drawing on Knowles' (1989) andragogy and Vygotsky's (1962) social constructivism, the article outlined pertinent issues on adult learners' perspectives

toward learning and their motivation for learning. Thus, the influence of functional literacy manifested through the enhancement of participants' confidence in taking part in social and economic activities as compared to non-participants. Most ABEP participants perceived literacy education as the only way to enhance their livelihoods and compensate for lost opportunities (Street, 2003; Thompson, 2002). ABEP participants and non-participants' age averaged 58 and 48 years, respectively. Most participants were mostly females (93.3%), which probably was an indication of some existential cultural and psychosocial barriers impeding men's active participation. Most ABEP participants (66.7%) had earlier discontinued primary education before joining the adult literacy class. Findings revealed that lack of good infrastructure, poor governance, personal and socio-economic challenges such as sickness, poor eyesight due to senility, employment issues, family and farming demands were some of the impediments in ABEP participation. Single language policy in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society was also one of the challenges of ABEP implementation; the use of Setswana as the only medium of instruction in ABEP constituted a language barrier to participating minority groups (see, for instance, Maruatona, 2002).

*T*-test results showed that there was a significant difference between participants' and non-participants' age. The results also indicated that there was a significant difference between participants' and non-participants' household size and association membership. The exact income earned per month and the impact of ABEP were not significantly different in the two groups of respondents probably because they had similar means of livelihoods mostly through the government social welfare programmes and farming. This probably indicates that taking part in ABEP activities may not necessarily have had a considerable impact on participants' socio-economic statuses. The income status of those who participated in ABEP and those who did not probably did not reflect on how literacy attainment enhances participants' socio-economic status. Findings indicated that the less appreciable impact, which ABEP had on the literacy level of people in the area, may not have been unconnected with the problems that bedeviled the literacy programme particularly poor infrastructure, and inadequate reading and writing materials. Although many challenges remain, findings revealed that ABEP equipped its participants with a measure of reading and writing skills, which in turn, boosted their confidence to participate more in community development activities as compared to their non-participating counterparts.

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