



Assessment of Learners' Retention Strategies in Literacy, Skills Acquisition and Empowerment Programmes in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract. This study examines learners' retention strategies in literacy, skills acquisition, and empowerment programs within Lagos State, Nigeria. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research investigates various retention strategies and assesses their effectiveness in enhancing learner engagement and persistence. The study population consists of learners and facilitators from seventeen literacy and skills acquisition centers operated by the Lagos State Agency for Mass Education. Data collection methods include structured questionnaires and oral interviews. The validity of the questionnaires was ensured through a standardization process, and reliability was tested to confirm the consistency of results. The findings highlight a range of retention strategies employed, including flexible scheduling, personalized mentoring, hands-on activities, free tuition, and post-training support. These strategies contribute empirical evidence to the existing literature on effective retention methods and demonstrate the positive impact of technology on learner engagement and persistence. Based on the findings, the need to enhance flexibility, investing in personalized mentoring, ensuring affordability, effectively integrating technology, providing continuous professional development for instructors, promoting recognition and certification, and fostering community engagement were recommended. Implementing these recommendations can create a more supportive learning environment, leading to improved retention rates and educational outcomes for learners in Lagos State.

1. Background to the study

Literacy and Skill acquisition is a vital pillar for personal development and economic stability, especially for those unable to secure formal employment due to lack of academic qualifications. The relevance of skill acquisition can be likened to the necessity of water for the human body or salt for soup—it is indispensable. Skills not only enhance employment opportunities but also contribute significantly to crime reduction within societies

(Akinyemi & Oyediran, 2020). Every year, thousands of students graduate from secondary schools and higher institutions, with more than 60% seeking better opportunities (Adewale, 2021). Acquiring skills enables individuals to better manage resources, improve strategic planning, and mitigate organizational crises based on their experiences.

In Lagos State, the rapid urbanization and population growth have created a diverse and challenging environment for both formal and informal educational sectors. Despite the presence of numerous educational institutions, a significant portion of the adult population remains underserved in terms of access to quality education and vocational training. The government's efforts to improve literacy rates and skill development are critical to addressing these gaps and ensuring that individuals can contribute meaningfully to the economy (Ololube et al., 2021).

Literacy extends beyond the ability to read and write, encompassing a broad spectrum of skills necessary for effective communication and participation in society. UNESCO (2006) defines literacy as a continuum of learning that enables individuals to achieve their goals, develop their knowledge and potential, and participate fully in their community and wider society. In contemporary contexts, literacy also includes digital literacy, financial literacy, and health literacy, each playing a crucial role in an individual's ability to navigate and succeed in the modern world (UNESCO, 2020). while Skill acquisition is the process of learning and developing competencies required to perform specific tasks or jobs effectively. This includes both vocational skills and soft skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork. The acquisition of these skills is vital for individuals to secure employment, improve their job performance, and pursue entrepreneurial ventures (Akinyemi & Ofem, 2021).

For many adults in Lagos State, limited literacy skills pose significant barriers to accessing employment

opportunities, engaging in lifelong learning, and achieving economic stability. Enhancing literacy skills is therefore essential for personal development and Economic empowerment. Economic empowerment, as defined by the World Bank (2002), involves increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable the institutions that affect their lives. Skill acquisition and empowerment programs in Lagos State therefore focus on providing both theoretical knowledge and practical experience, enabling participants to achieve economic self-sufficiency and contribute to the broader economy (Nwogu & Agboola, 2020).

However, Retention in education programs is a critical measure of their effectiveness. High retention rates indicate that participants find the programs valuable and are motivated to complete their studies. Conversely, low retention rates can signal issues such as inadequate support, lack of engagement, or mismatched expectations. Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Retention highlights the importance of academic and social integration in ensuring student persistence. In the context of literacy and skill acquisition programs, retention is crucial for ensuring that learners fully benefit from the educational interventions and achieve their learning objectives (Tinto, 1993). In Lagos State, literacy and skill acquisition programs must implement strategies to enhance retention, such as providing academic support, fostering a sense of community, and addressing individual learner needs. By doing so, these programs can ensure that participants are better equipped to utilize their new skills and knowledge in real-world contexts (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2021).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In line with the Federal Government's directive that all States should establish Agencies to address problems associated with illiteracy and skill gap in the country. The government of Lagos state launched an adult literacy and skill Education Programme tagged 'Lagos is Learning (Èkó ñkẹkòdó)' in October 2016. Sadly, a high number of learners who registered in these non-formal education centres leaves the programmes before finishing one educational level. The level of unemployed young adult without vocational skill is increasing because of inability to stay and complete training circle. The main reason for learners' unsuccessful completion of the learning programmes is still obscured, and this has been a major concern among the stakeholders. Retention of learners in non-formal education centres is an ongoing problem across the country. Only one in five learners admitted in most non-formal education centres complete their

programmes. (Adewale, 2016). Instructors often struggle with meeting the unique interests of this population of learners, some of whom are often overwhelmed with high academic challenges and personal adversities. Sometimes, the unwholesome attitude of learners to non-formal education seems to suggest that these learners are greatly dissatisfied with learning environment. This situation prompted researcher to assess learners' retention strategies in Literacy, Skills Acquisition and Empowerment programmes.

1.2 Research Objectives

- What are the diverse retention strategies currently utilized in literacy, skills acquisition, and empowerment programs in Lagos State?
- How effective are these retention strategies employed in enhancing learners' engagement and persistence in literacy and skills acquisition programs?

1.3 Research Questions

- What are the diverse retention strategies currently utilized in literacy, skills acquisition, and empowerment programs within Lagos State?
- How effective are the different retention strategies employed in enhancing learners' engagement and persistence in literacy and skills acquisition programs?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Tinto's (1993) model of retention highlights the importance of academic and social integration in ensuring learners' persistence in educational programs. According to Tinto, learners who experience academic success and intellectual development are more likely to remain in the program. Additionally, social integration through supportive relationships with peers, instructors, and mentors is crucial in providing emotional and motivational support, which helps sustain effort and overcome challenges (Tinto, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Tinto's model also posits that for learners to persist in their educational programs, they must experience success and development in their academic endeavors while also feeling integrated into the social fabric of the learning environment. Academic integration involves learners engaging meaningfully with the

curriculum, finding the coursework intellectually stimulating, and achieving academic success. Social integration encompasses forming supportive relationships with peers, instructors, and mentors, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Numerous studies have validated Tinto's model across various educational contexts, confirming that both academic and social integration are critical determinants of student retention. For instance, Braxton et al. (2004) found that institutions that foster strong academic communities and social support systems have higher retention rates. Similarly, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) demonstrated that students who feel intellectually stimulated and socially connected are more likely to persist and succeed in their studies. Additionally, Kuh et al (2008) found that engagement in educationally purposeful activities significantly contributes to student retention. Their study emphasized that active and collaborative learning, along with faculty-student interaction, enhances students' academic and social integration, leading to better retention outcomes. Astin (1999) also supports this notion, arguing that student involvement in both academic and extracurricular activities is a crucial predictor.

Tinto's Model is particularly relevant to the study of retention strategies in literacy, skills acquisition, and empowerment programs within Lagos State because it provides a structured approach to understanding the multifaceted factors that influence learners' decisions to continue or discontinue their education.

2.2 Importance and Impact of Skill Acquisition

Skill acquisition is fundamental to achieving personal and professional goals, especially for individuals unable to secure formal employment in public or private sectors due to a lack of academic credentials. The significance of skill acquisition in fostering employment opportunities and reducing crime is well-documented, as it equips individuals with essential competencies for self-sufficiency and economic stability (Egbo, 2019). Skill acquisition is as crucial to personal development as water is to the human body or salt to soup, emphasizing its integral role in societal well-being.

The acquisition of skills directly correlates with increased employment opportunities. Each year, thousands of students graduate from secondary schools and higher institutions, with over 60% seeking better opportunities (Musowo & Echina, 2019). Skills acquired through vocational training or informal education programs enable these individuals to manage resources better, plan strategically, and mitigate organizational crises through accumulated

experience. This underscores the broader economic benefits of skill acquisition, as it not only addresses unemployment but also drives economic growth and stability (Adewale, 2016).

2.3 Challenges in Retention of Learners

Non-formal education centers, which play a crucial role in providing literacy and skill acquisition programs to underserved populations, face significant challenges in retaining learners. High dropout rates are a persistent issue, undermining the effectiveness of these initiatives and limiting their impact on poverty reduction and economic empowerment (UNESCO, 2023). Several factors contribute to these high dropout rates.

Economic pressures are a primary factor, as many learners come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The need to earn a livelihood often takes precedence over continuing education, leading individuals to work long hours or multiple jobs to support themselves and their families, leaving little time or energy for attending classes (World Bank, 2022). Academic challenges also play a significant role. Learners may struggle with the academic demands of the programs, especially if they have had limited prior education (Akande, 2019). A lack of foundational skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic can make it difficult to keep up with the curriculum, leading to frustration and eventual dropout (OECD, 2023).

Personal and social factors further exacerbate dropout rates. Personal issues such as health problems, family responsibilities, and social pressures contribute significantly. Women and girls often face additional barriers due to gender roles and expectations, such as domestic duties and caregiving responsibilities, which can interfere with their ability to attend classes regularly (UNICEF, 2022). Additionally, the quality of instruction and the adequacy of learning facilities impact learner retention. Instructors who are not well-trained or facilities that are poorly equipped can diminish the learning experience, causing learners to lose interest and drop out (ILO, 2023).

2.4 Effective Retention Strategies

Flexible scheduling plays a crucial role in accommodating the diverse needs of learners in educational programs. By offering classes at varying times, including evenings and weekends, institutions can cater to learners who have work or family commitments during traditional school hours (UNESCO, 2023). This flexibility enables learners to

balance their educational pursuits with other responsibilities, reducing the likelihood of dropout due to scheduling conflicts (ILO, 2022). Personalized mentoring provides learners with individualized support and guidance tailored to their specific needs and challenges. Mentors can offer academic assistance, career advice, and emotional support, fostering a supportive relationship that encourages learners to persist in their studies (OECD, 2023). This one-on-one interaction helps learners feel valued and understood, increasing their motivation and engagement with the educational program (UNICEF, 2022). Engaging learners in practical hands-on activities enhances their learning experience by allowing them to apply theoretical concepts in real-world contexts. These activities promote active participation and experiential learning, making the educational content more relevant and memorable (World Bank, 2023). By providing opportunities for hands-on practice, institutions can improve learner retention and motivation, as learners see the immediate relevance and utility of what they are learning (WHO, 2023). The provision of free tuition removes financial barriers to education, ensuring that all learners have access to educational opportunities regardless of their economic circumstances. By eliminating the cost of tuition, institutions make education more accessible and affordable, particularly for marginalized and disadvantaged populations (UNDP, 2023). Free tuition reduces financial stress and incentivizes learners to enroll and persist in educational programs, ultimately leading to higher retention rates (UNESCO, 2022). Post-training support provides learners with ongoing assistance and resources after they have completed their educational programs. This support may include job placement services, career counseling, and access to continuing education opportunities (World Bank, 2023). By helping learners' transition successfully into the workforce or further education, post-training support reinforces the value of their educational experience and encourages them to remain engaged with the institution (ILO, 2023).

3. Research Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, specifically the sequential exploratory design. This approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative research methods, allowing for a comprehensive analysis that combines numerical data with detailed personal insights. The population consisted of learners and facilitators from seventeen literacy, skills acquisition, and empowerment centers in Lagos State. According to the Lagos State Agency for Mass Education (LSAME) in 2021, there were 4,885

registered students across 20 state-owned centers for skill acquisition and empowerment. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the sample size: First Stage: Simple random sampling was employed to select 8 centers from the total 20.

Purposive sampling was used to select all learners at the final stage and their facilitators, resulting in a total of 201 participants. Two primary instruments were used for data collection: Structured Questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data regarding the effectiveness of various retention strategies. while Oral Interview Guide facilitated the collection of qualitative data, providing deeper insights into learners' experiences and perspectives.

The validity and reliability of the instruments were established through a standardization process: the initial drafts of the questionnaire and interview guide were reviewed by two experts in the fields of education, literacy programs, and vocational training. These experts evaluated the instruments for comprehensiveness, relevance, and clarity. Feedback from the experts was used to make necessary revisions, ensuring that the instruments adequately covered all pertinent aspects of learner retention and engagement

The instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the structured questionnaire. In this study, the items on the questionnaire were grouped into different scales based on the constructs they were intended to measure (e.g., retention strategies, learner engagement). Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each scale, and items that did not contribute to an acceptable alpha level were revised. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.80 was realized indicating good internal consistency

Descriptive statistics of simple percentages and frequency distribution tables, were used to analyze participants' demographic data. Mean and standard deviation were employed to interpret responses to the research questions. The effectiveness of different retention strategies was assessed using 4 Likert scale responses, which were then statistically analyzed.

Content and thematic analysis were used to analyze the oral interviews. This involved coding the interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns that provided deeper insights into the retention strategies and their effectiveness.

3.1 Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent from all participants were obtained, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to

withdraw at any time. Also, confidentiality and anonymity of participants were ensured by anonymizing data and securely storing information. While Ethical Approval from the relevant department and centers were sorted

4. Results and Findings

4.1 What are the diverse retention strategies currently utilized in literacy, skills acquisition, and empowerment programs within Lagos State?

Figure 1: Diverse retention strategies currently utilized in literacy, skills acquisition, and empowerment programs within Lagos State

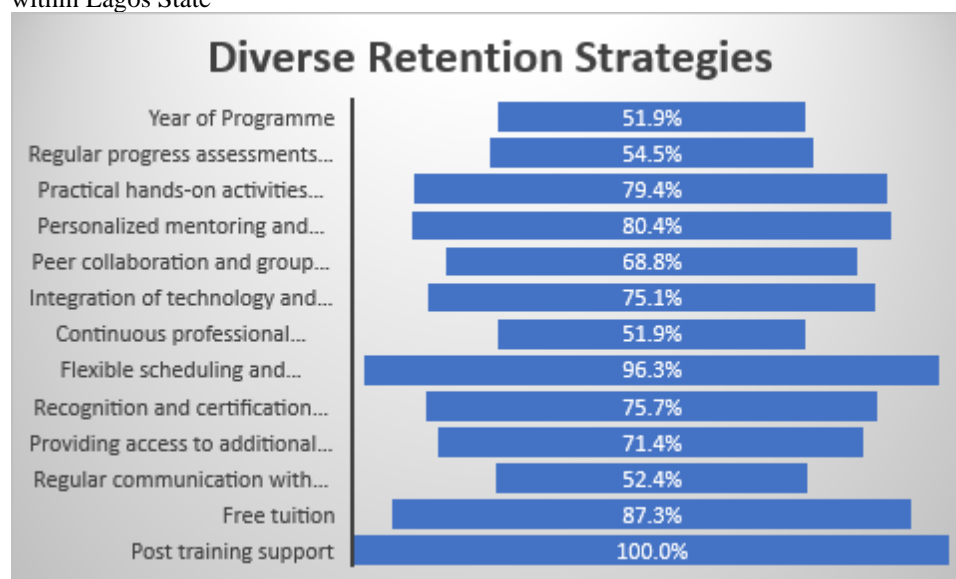


Figure 1 presents various strategies used to improve retention in literacy, skills acquisition, and empowerment programs in Lagos State. Notably, 96.3% of respondents emphasized the importance of flexible scheduling and program duration. Personalized mentoring and one-on-one support were recognized by 80.4% of respondents, underlining the significance of tailored guidance. Additionally, hands-on activities and real-life simulations were valued by a substantial 79.4% of respondents for enhancing engagement. Offering free tuition was acknowledged by a significant 87.3% of respondents, indicating the impact of affordability on program continuity. Most strikingly, 100.0% of respondents stressed the necessity of post-training support, underscoring its vital role in ensuring ongoing success and participation after program completion. Thus, the diverse retention strategies utilized in literacy, skills acquisition, and empowerment programs within Lagos State, ranked by the percent of cases, the first five are as follows: Post training support -100.0%, Flexible scheduling and program duration - 96.3%, Free tuition - 87.3%, Personalized mentoring and one-on-one support - 80.4%, Practical hands-on activities and real-life simulations - 79.4% while others also have scores above average.

4.2 How effective are the different retention strategies employed in enhancing learners' engagement and persistence in literacy and skills acquisition programs?

Table 2: Effectiveness of the different retention strategies employed

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	SD
1	The use of practical hands-on activities significantly enhances learners' engagement in literacy and skills acquisition programs	44.5	28.8	15.7	11.0	3.07	1.021
2	Personalized mentoring and individualized support have a positive impact on learners' persistence in these programs.	50.8	26.7	14.7	7.9	3.20	0.965

3	Integrating technology and digital resources effectively boosts learners' engagement in literacy and skills acquisition programs.	40.8	28.3	17.3	13.6	2.96	1.063
4	Continuous professional development for instructors contributes to learners' higher engagement and persistence	36.1	29.3	18.3	16.2	2.85	1.086
5	Flexibility in scheduling and program duration positively influences learners' persistence in literacy and skills acquisition programs.	57.1	25.7	10.5	6.8	3.33	0.918
6	Recognition and certification for achievements play a significant role in enhancing learners' engagement in these programs	46.6	22.5	19.9	11.0	3.05	1.053
7	Access to additional learning resources effectively contributes to learners' engagement and persistence.	29.3	27.2	28.8	14.7	2.71	1.044
8	The provision of free tuition enhances learners' engagement and persistence in literacy and skills acquisition programs	68.1	17.8	7.3	6.8	3.47	0.899
9	Post training support positively impacts learners' persistence in literacy and skills acquisition programs	70.2	16.8	6.3	6.8	3.50	0.888

Table 2 presents an assessment of the effectiveness of different retention strategies in literacy and skills acquisition programs based on respondent feedback. The analysis indicates that flexible scheduling and program duration have a highly positive influence on learner persistence, with 57.1% strongly agreeing. The mean for this strategy is 3.33, with a standard deviation of 0.918, suggesting strong agreement and relatively low variability in responses. Similarly, providing free tuition is widely acknowledged, with 68.1% strongly agreeing on its positive impact. The mean for this strategy is 3.47, with a standard deviation of 0.899, indicating strong agreement and relatively low variability in responses. Post training support is also deemed highly effective, as 70.2% strongly agree on its role in boosting learner persistence. The mean for this strategy is 3.50, with a standard deviation of 0.888, highlighting strong agreement and low variability in responses.

Personalized mentoring is recognized by 50.8% as beneficial for learner persistence, with a mean of 3.20 and a standard deviation of 0.965, suggesting a moderate to strong level of agreement with some variability in responses. Moreover, recognition and certification for achievements (mean: 3.05, standard deviation: 1.053) and practical hands-on activities (mean: 3.07, standard deviation: 1.021) are perceived as significantly enhancing learner engagement, with moderate agreement and some variability in responses. Integrating technology (mean: 2.96, standard deviation: 1.063) and access to additional learning resources (mean: 2.71, standard deviation: 1.044) are seen as contributing positively to engagement, although with slightly lower mean scores and higher variability in responses. Continuous professional development for instructors (mean: 2.85, standard deviation: 1.086) is noted to enhance engagement and persistence, albeit with a lower mean and relatively higher variability in responses compared to other strategies.

Thus, the different retention strategies employed, ranging from post-training support and free tuition to flexible scheduling and program duration, are perceived as effective in enhancing learners' engagement and persistence in literacy and skills acquisition programs, with some strategies being considered very effective.

Moreover, the qualitative analysis provided insights into the Retention Strategies in Literacy Programs. Respondents highlighted the effectiveness of various technological tools, including learning platforms, interactive exercises, multimedia elements, and real-time feedback mechanisms, in enhancing learner engagement and retention.

Retention Strategies in Literacy Programs

Participant “Adewale” emphasized the importance of encouragement and accountability in attendance, stating, *"Yeah, there are different means they used to encourage us to come to school."* He further explained, *"They will call us that there is an assignment for us,"* highlighting the proactive measures taken by the program administrators to keep learners engaged. Adewale also mentioned the consequence of irregular attendance, stating, *"If you don't come to the center for certain days, you will not be given a certificate,"* indicating the motivational impact of certification on attendance.

Socio-economic Factors

Participant “Kemi” expressed appreciation for the support and motivation provided by the program, stating, *"The motivation they are giving to us, the encouragement they are giving to us, and the support they are giving to us is encouraging."* Kemi's statement underscores the role of socio-economic support in fostering learner engagement and persistence in literacy programs.

Impact of Technology on Program Accessibility “WhatsApp and Digital Tools”

Participant Joy highlighted the role of technology, particularly WhatsApp, in facilitating communication and information sharing among learners, stating, "*We have WhatsApp*," and emphasizing its utility in maintaining contact with peers and instructors. Joy further explained, "*Through WhatsApp, we talk always just, you know, WhatsApp*," indicating the platform's central role in learner interaction and support.

Improved Communication and Information Sharing

Participant Toyin acknowledged the positive impact of technology on program accessibility, noting, "*Through the video they sent to us, then we can watch*," emphasizing the role of digital tools in delivering instructional content." Toyin also mentioned the importance of accessible information, stating, "*We can easily get information, we can really get email and get some other information which has also been encouraging*," highlighting the role of technology in enhancing learner access to resources and support.

5. Discussion of findings

The study identified various retention strategies utilized in literacy, skills acquisition, and empowerment programs within Lagos State, the identified strategies include flexible scheduling, personalized mentoring, hands-on activities, free tuition, and post-training support. The findings aligned with existing literature on retention strategies in education and the role of technology in enhancing learning outcomes. The use of flexible scheduling and program duration has been highlighted in previous research as beneficial for accommodating learners' diverse needs and improving retention rates (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015). Similarly, personalized mentoring has been identified as a critical factor in fostering learner persistence and success in educational programs (Tinto, 2017)

The findings further shows that Flexible scheduling, free tuition, and post-training support were perceived as highly effective in enhancing learner engagement and persistence, based on respondent feedback. Personalized mentoring also emerged as beneficial for learner persistence. The effectiveness of free tuition and post-training support in promoting learner engagement and persistence is consistent with studies by Bettinger et al., (2017); Deming et al., (2013) who emphasizing the importance of affordability and

ongoing assistance in retaining learners in educational programs, particularly in low-income communities

However, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges associated with technology integration, particularly regarding accessibility and usability issues. While technology offers numerous benefits, ensuring equitable access and user-friendly interfaces are crucial considerations to maximize its effectiveness in supporting learner retention and participation (UNESCO, 2017).

5.1 Qualitative findings

The findings from the interviews resonate with existing literature on retention strategies in education. Adewale's "*They will call us that there is an assignment for us* experience" highlights the importance of motivational factors in encouraging learner participation. This aligns with research by Tinto (2017), which emphasizes the significance of creating a supportive environment to foster learner persistence. Adewale's statement about the consequences of absenteeism on certificate attainment reflects the role of extrinsic motivators in driving learner engagement (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015).

Similarly, Kemi's testimony "*The motivation they are giving to us, the encouragement they are giving to us, and the support they are giving to us is encouraging*," underscores the influence of socio-economic factors on learner retention. The support and encouragement provided by the literacy program staff contribute to learners' sense of belonging and motivation to continue their education. This finding echoes the literature on the impact of socio-economic factors on educational attainment and retention (Bettinger et al., 2017; Deming et al., 2013).

The use of digital tools, such as WhatsApp, as mentioned by Joy, illustrates how technology facilitates communication and information sharing among learners and program staff. This aligns with Hew and Cheung's (2014) findings, which suggest that digital platforms enhance learner engagement and participation by providing accessible and interactive learning experiences.

Toyin's experience further emphasizes the role of technology in improving program accessibility. The availability of videos and other digital resources enables learners to access information and support outside of traditional classroom settings. This finding supports UNESCO's (2017) emphasis on the importance of technology in expanding access to

education and empowering learners in diverse contexts.

Balaji's description of the friendly interaction with facilitators highlights the significance of a learner-centered approach in promoting engagement and collaboration. This aligns with literature emphasizing the importance of supportive relationships between learners and instructors in educational settings (Tinto, 2017). Balaji's experience underscores the value of interactive teaching methods in fostering a sense of community and shared learning goals (Hew & Cheung, 2014).

Overall, the study's findings contribute valuable empirical evidence to the existing literature by highlighting effective retention strategies and the positive impact of technology on learner engagement and persistence in educational programs.

6. Conclusion

The study delved into the assessment of learners' retention strategies in literacy, skills acquisition, and empowerment programs within Lagos State. It identified various retention strategies, including flexible scheduling, personalized mentoring, hands-on activities, free tuition, and post-training support. These strategies were found to align with existing literature on retention strategies in education, emphasizing the importance of accommodating diverse learner needs and providing ongoing assistance to improve retention rates.

7. Recommendations

- Education centers should continue to prioritize flexible scheduling and program duration to accommodate diverse learner needs and improve retention rates.
- The management of the Centre should provide personalized mentoring and one-on-one support should be prioritized to foster learner persistence and success in educational programs.
- Governments and educational institutions should ensure free tuition and post-training support to make educational programs more accessible and affordable, particularly for low-income communities.
- Education centers should leverage technology and digital tools, including interactive learning platforms, multimedia elements, and real-time feedback mechanisms, to enhance learner engagement and retention. However, it's crucial to address accessibility and usability challenges associated with technology integration.
- Government Should promote recognition and certification by recognizing learners' achievements and providing certifications can further motivate

learners to stay engaged and complete educational programs.

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