



## **Improving Life Skills in Rural women through Adult Literacy Program in Tehsil D.G. Khan**

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### **Abstract**

*This study explored the role of Adult Literacy program in improving the literacy skills, general knowledge and health conditions on rural women. A sample of 330 learners was drawn through multistage sampling. The findings showed that learners have improved their reading and writing skills, basic arithmetic skills, vocabulary, and understanding of national language and currency notes. Further, their understanding and awareness about various aspects of their life including religious rites and practices, history of religion, cooking and home remedies has also increased. The program also enhanced learner's awareness about health problems, hygienic principles, self-medication, importance of cleanliness and child care. This knowledge helped them to practice healthy behaviors and to improve their health conditions.*

**Key Words:** *Life Skills, Literacy Skills, Health Conditions, Religious Knowledge*



### **Introduction**

The majority of emerging nations see the importance of maintaining sizable adult literacy programs and pledge to make special efforts to end illiteracy in the upcoming ten years. Nearly a billion persons worldwide are illiterate, at least 600 million of whom are women. According to Aftab (1994), the majority of them reside in nine sizable nations: Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, and Pakistan. The majority have never attended school, while others are illiterate as a result of early dropout or ineffective education. More adults are illiterate than there are primary school kids in the world, which totals over 700 million (Abadzi, 2003).

The task of developing an adult literacy program is difficult since it focuses on economically disadvantaged, emotionally troubled, and psychologically impoverished illiterates. The frantic pace of life required for survival made implementing the program much more challenging. The primary worry of Pakistani adults without education is simply getting by. Many of the same cultural obstacles that girls confront also apply to adult women. However, Pakistan is having a serious problem with its high dropout rate, poor participation rate, and widespread literacy (Rehman, 2008).

The general literacy rate (age 10 and above) is 60% according to the most recent Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) Survey (2019–20), with 70% of males and 49% of women being literate. According to the data, literacy rates are still higher for males (70%) than for women (49%), and they are also higher in urban regions (76%) than in rural ones (51%). Although development is varied throughout the provinces, it is clear from the data that overall female literacy is increasing with time. In Punjab, the literacy rate was 57%, Sindh was 47%, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was 37%, and Balochistan was 29% when examined provincially.

The Punjab Literacy and NFBE Department has been actively promoting literacy as a means of combating illiteracy in the nation. The construction of Adult Literacy Centers (ALCs) for the target age group of 11 to 40 years is the method employed to impart literacy skills. This intense six-month adult literacy course's goal is to teach people basic literacy by giving them another opportunity to become independent readers and writers. It is encouraging to see the community once more offering great support and a warm welcome to the opening of these centers. Some of the literate members of the community not only donate space for these centers but also volunteer their time as teachers. The main objective is to teach the women the fundamentals of literacy.



The primary goal is to provide basic literacy skills to the women in the age group of 11-40, either never enrolled or dropped out of school before acquiring literacy skills (Literacy & NFBED, 2022).

Another goal is to equip learners with life skills which help people make sensible decisions, resolve issues, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, create and maintain good relationships, have empathy for others, and cope with and manage their life in a positive and healthy way (UNICEF, 2012). The WHO (1996) states that life skills "may be directed towards personal actions, actions towards others, as well as towards actions to change the surrounding environment to make it conducive to health." Keeping in mind the WHO definition, the Basic Life Skills program gives adults the emotional, social, and intellectual capabilities they need to succeed in life on a personal, interpersonal, community, and workplace level.

The indicators for the minimal level of knowledge of Adult Literacy Centre (ALC) graduates served as the operational definition for Punjab Literacy and Non-formal Basic Education Department and are as follows:

1. Language: After completing six months of course, graduates will have attained a level of literacy that will allow them to read news articles at a rate of 20 words per minute while understanding the language. Possess the ability to write 7–10 sentences about their local surroundings, taking care to utilize the right pronouns, singular/plural, and conjunctions.
2. Numerical: Ability to manipulate three-digit numbers by adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing
3. Life skill: Knowledge of the methods of emotional restraint and tolerance.

### **Objectives of the study**

This study focused on the following objectives.

1. To assess the improvements in literacy skills of women obtained through adult literacy program.
2. To explore the improvements in general knowledge of women obtained through adult literacy program.
3. To examine the improvements in health conditions of women obtained through adult literacy program.



### **Review of literature**

Beder (2002) concluded that adult literacy programs have several effects on learners' lives. Through participation in this program, learners achieve gains in employment, earnings, positive influence on participants' continued education and reduced dependency on welfare. Further, learners perceived gains in their reading, writing and mathematical skills, positive impacts on their self-image and personal goals. So, participation in adult literacy has several social and economic gains for learners.

Fiedrich and Jellema (2003) researched the impact of literacy on gender equality. Literacy has proved helpful in reducing any kind of such inequality. Literacy enables a large number of people to participate in the growth process. The gender inequality between the men and the women could be reduced by focusing the female literacy, limiting the ways in which gender equality can be addressed holistically and directly through the programs themselves. Most of the programs tend to concentrate specifically on women's inequality rather than gender equality. Participation in adult literacy programs does enable women to gain access to and challenge male domains by entering male-dominated areas of work, learning languages of power previously associated with men and participating in household finances.

Nansubuga (2004) stated that being a woman is something to be proud of, but it involves many challenges, particularly in case of education. Social, economic, and cultural systems throughout the world usually do not support women's literacy. However, adult literacy can help women to overcome barriers and empower themselves and their communities. In this process, the adult educators have to do several tasks that include: to ask women what they need, to respect voices from all cultures, to make connections with diverse learners, and to link educational programs with what is happening in communities. The suitable approaches for this process should include women's participation in curriculum development, using real life issues in lesson plans, and helping women increase their participation in politics. In order to acquire women's literacy, it is necessary to reduce negative images of women at grassroots level through education. This can lead us from self-empowerment of women to community-empowerment.

UNESCO (2006) reported that literacy is very useful in inculcating humanistic etiquettes and manners in people. The human benefits that could be produced from participation in adult literacy programs and the practice of literacy include the factors such as improved self-esteem, empowerment, creativity and critical reflection. Human benefits are intrinsically valuable and



may also be instrumental in realizing other benefits of literacy: improved health, increased political participation and so on.

Rehman (2008) studied the impacts of adult literacy on women lives in District Kech and concluded that adult literacy program leads to emotional and psychological control, develop caring attitudes, enhance day-to-day learning and tends to lead community participation. This study has explored the ways in which adult literacy learners view their experiences of literacy program in their lives. The study reported high rates of take-up and participation and was perhaps more positive than might be expected on the basis of adult literacy programs in Pakistan. Saleem et al. (2009) concluded that teaching women plays a key role in the process of economic and social development, to achieve active and interactive coexistence for the males and females of Jordan in a community of twenty first century. It realizes the vision of active contribution for men and women together, hand in hand in economic and social development with their full creative energies noting that they are the most expensive and valuable assets in the country's knowledge banks. The increase in number of adult education and literacy centers demonstrate the awareness of Jordanian women of the value and importance of learning is increasing. This is due to the fact that these centers provide vocational training centers in many fields like sewing and agriculture that helped to attract applicants to benefit from the knowledge and skills that can generate reasonable income for themselves and their families.

### **Research Methodology**

A cross-sectional survey was conducted on women who were enrolled and in last stage of Adult Literacy Program of Punjab Literacy and Non-formal Basic Education Department in Tehsil Dera Ghazi Khan. The population of the present study consisted of all the female learners (students) of the Adult Literacy centers who were going to complete the phase (six months) of adult literacy Program. The sample was drawn by using multistage sampling. At first stage, three (3) union councils (Jhok Utra, Mana Ahmadani and Notak) of Tehsil Dera Ghazi Khan were selected purposively as the phase of program was going to complete here. The list of Adult Literacy Centers was taken from the office of Punjab Literacy and Non-formal Basic Education Department and learners were selected through attendance registers of each center. At the at the second stage, ten (10) Adult Literacy Centers were selected and at third stage, eleven (11) learners were selected from each center. So, the sample size of the present study was  $(3 \times 10 \times 11 = 330)$  learners. Interview schedule was preferred for data collection because the



population was not well educated. Pre-testing was done to check the validity and reliability of the research tool. For pre-testing, 40 respondents were interviewed. After pre-testing, 3 questions were added, and two questions were restated. Chi-square and percentage analyses of the data were performed.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

All these respondents of this study were illiterate rural females between the ages of (11-40) years. The age of learners is a very important factor that influences their ability to enhance their literacy skills. The young learners have greater interest in improving their reading and writing skills while old learners were interested more to know about health problems, childcare, home remedies and currency notes. Moreover, the old learners were less regular than the young ones. The marital status of learners is another important factor that influences their capacity and availability to attend literacy classes. In rural areas the girls are usually married at an earlier age and girls' education in this area of the country is not so much valued. Parents usually consider their daughters a burden and want to get rid of them as soon as possible. At a younger age and without any formal education, most of the girls start their motherhood which can affect their own health as well as the health of infants. The data showed that the majority of respondents were married.

The literacy skills of the respondents were measured through several indicators including their reading and writing skills, basic arithmetic skills, vocabulary, understanding of national language and understanding of currency notes. These indicators were selected from contents of the syllabus designed by Punjab Literacy and Non-formal Basic Education Department.

The results of figure 1 show that adult literacy programs have significantly improved the literacy skills of learners. The first indicator to measure literacy skills was the improvements in reading and writing skills. Majority of the respondents i.e., 56.0 percent said that their reading and writing skills have improved to some extent and 37.0 percent of respondents claimed that their skills have been improved to great extent while only 7.0 percent of respondents stated that there is no improvement in their reading and writing skills at all. This shows that 93.0 percent of the respondents have improved their reading and writing skills either to great extent or to some extent after participation in an adult literacy program.

Figure 1

*Improvements in literacy skills*

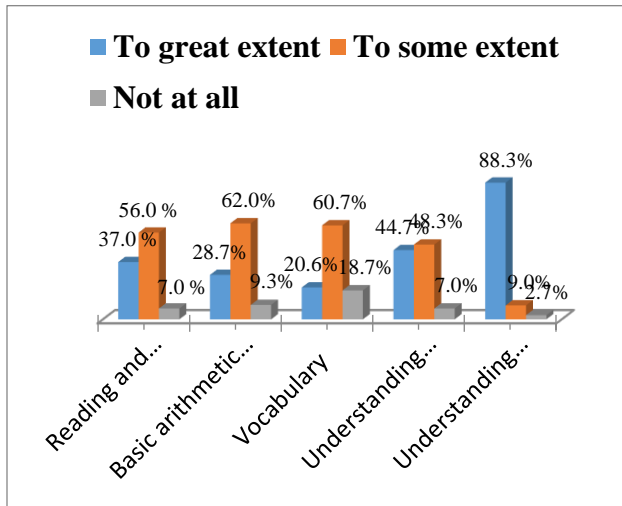
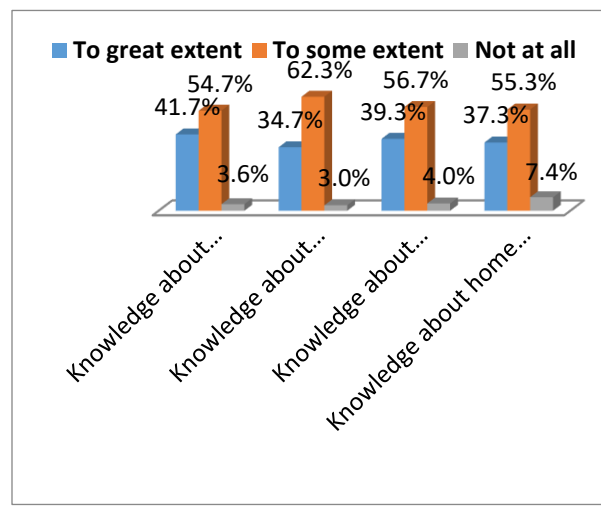


Figure 2

*Improvements in knowledge*



The second aspect to measure the literacy skills was the improvements in basic arithmetic skills. Majority of the respondents i.e., 62.0 percent said that their arithmetic skills have improved to some extent and 28.7 percent of respondents claimed that their skills have been improved to great extent while only 9.3 percent of the respondents stated that their skills have not improved at all. This represents that 90.7 percent of respondents have improved their arithmetic skills either to great extent or to some extent after participation in adult literacy classes.

The third criterion to measure literacy skills was the improvement in vocabulary. Majority of the respondents i.e., 60.7 percent said that their vocabulary has been improved to some extent and 20.6 percent of respondents claimed that improvements in their vocabulary were to great extent while 18.7 percent of respondents stated that their vocabulary has not been improved at all. This indicates that 81.3 percent of respondents agreed that the adult literacy program has improved their vocabulary either to great extent or to some extent. The fourth aspect of literacy skills was the improvement in understanding of national language (Urdu). Majority of the respondents i.e., 48.3 percent said that their skill to understand national language has been improved to some extent and 44.7 percent of respondents claimed that there was improvement in their skill to great extent while only 7.0 percent of respondents said that there was no improvement at all. These results depict that 93.0 percent of respondents have felt improvements in their skill to understand national language (urdu) after participation in adult literacy program.





The fifth indicator to measure literacy skills of learners was the improvement in understanding of currency notes. Majority of the respondents i.e., 88.3 percent said that their skill to understand currency notes have been improved to great extent and the 9.0 percent of the respondents claimed that their skill has been improved to some extent while only 2.7 percent of the respondents stated that there were no improvements in their skill at all. This shows that 97.3 percent of respondents have felt improvements in their skill to understand the currency notes either to great extent or to some extent after participation in literacy program.

The syllabus of adult classes also includes the knowledge about religious rites and practices. The teachers also tell the learners about the history of religion (stories of prophets). They also give them knowledge about cooking and home remedies. These contents of syllabus helped the learners a lot in their practical household life and also enhanced their knowledge about religion. The learners took keen interest in them. The topics were selected by consultation of the learners. The learners used to tell the local area supervisor what they wanted to know actually then the supervisor used to give them the required information on their next visit. Figure 2 explains that the adult literacy program has significantly improved the knowledge of learners about different aspects of their life. The first indicator was to measure their knowledge about religious rites and practices. Majority of the respondents i.e., 54.7 percent said that their knowledge about religious rites and practices has been improved to some extent and 41.7 percent of respondents stated that their knowledge was improved to great extent while only 3.6 percent of respondents said that their knowledge was not increased at all. This shows that 96.4 percent of respondents said that adult literacy programs have increased their knowledge about religious rites and practices either to a great extent or to some extent.

The second aspect was to measure their knowledge about the history of religion. Majority of the respondents i.e., 62.3 percent said that their knowledge about history of religion was increased to some extent and the 34.7 percent of respondents claimed that their knowledge was improved to great extent while only 3.0 percent of the respondents said that their knowledge was not improved at all. These results indicate that the adult literacy program has increased the knowledge of 97.0 percent of respondents regarding history of religion (stories of prophets). The third aspect was to measure the knowledge about cooking (new recipes). Majority of the respondents i.e., 56.7 percent said that their knowledge about cooking has been increased to some extent and 39.3 percent of respondents claimed that their knowledge was improved to great





extent while only 4.0 percent of respondents said that their knowledge was not improved at all. This describes that 96.0 percent of respondents have improved their knowledge about cooking (new recipes) either to some extent or to great extent after adult literacy classes. The fourth aspect was to measure the knowledge about home remedies (*totkay*). Majority of the respondents i.e., 55.3 percent said that their knowledge about home remedies have increased to some extent and 37.3 percent respondents stated that their knowledge was increased to great extent while only 7.4 percent of respondents said that their knowledge was not improved at all. These results are consistent with previous studies which also reported increased knowledge, awareness and communication skills among learners of Adult Literacy Programs (Malicky & Norman, 1996; Nansubuga, 2004).

The syllabus of the adult literacy program included the lesson on different diseases of children and adults, their remedies and information about preventive measures. The learners are also trained to make ORS at home by using kitchen ingredients and to use various home remedies. The lessons also give information about hygiene principles such as how to keep the house clean, when and how to wash your hands and how to keep the environment healthy. The results shown in figure 3 indicate that adult literacy programs have improved learners' awareness about health issues in many different ways. The first indicator in this regard was to measure learners' awareness about different health problems. Majority of the respondents i.e., 59.0 percent said that their awareness about health problems has increased to great extent and 39.7 percent of respondents stated that improvements were to some extent while only 1.3 percent of respondents have not felt any improvement in their awareness about health problems. This shows that 98.7 percent of respondents have reported improvements in their awareness about health problems either to great extent or to some extent after participation in adult literacy programs. The second aspect of health issues was to measure the awareness about hygiene principles. Majority of the respondents i.e., 55.7 percent said that their awareness has increased to great extent and 42.7 percent of respondents reported the improvements to some extent) while only 1.6 percent of respondents stated that their awareness about hygiene principles has not been improved at all. This describes that 98.4 percent of respondents have felt improvements in their awareness about hygiene principles either to great extent or to some extent.

Figure 3

*Awareness about Health and Hygiene*

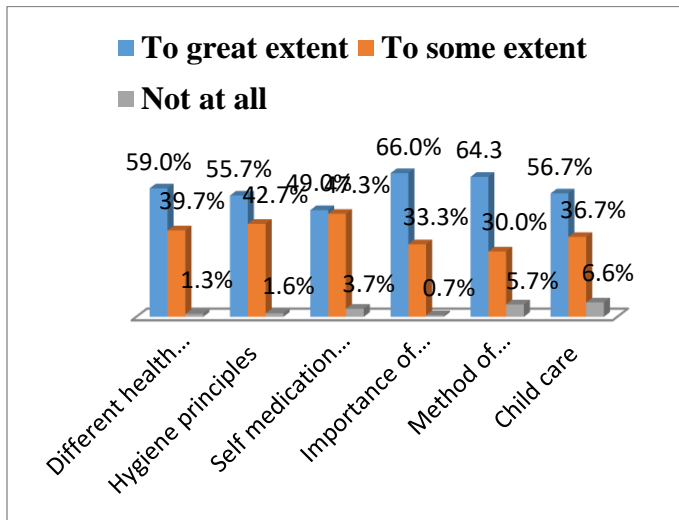
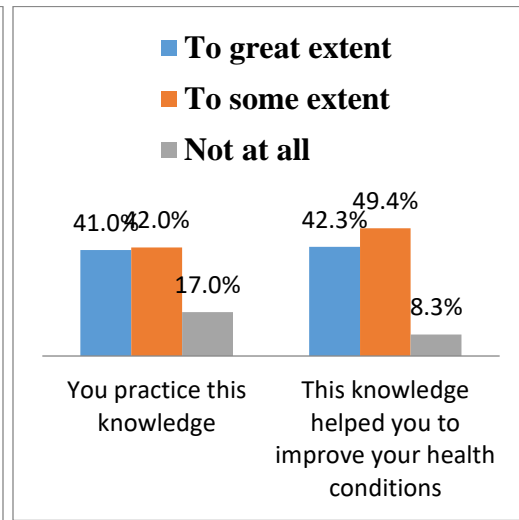


Figure 4

*Practicing Knowledge*



The third criterion was to measure the awareness about self-medication (home remedies). Majority of the respondents i.e., 49.0 percent stated that their awareness about self-medication has improved to great extent and 47.3 percent of respondents reported the improvements to some extent while only 3.7 of respondents claimed no improvements at all. This shows that 96.3 percent of respondents stated that their awareness about self-medication (home remedies) has improved either to great extent or to some extent after participation in adult literacy classes. The fourth parameter was the awareness about the importance of cleanliness. The majority of the respondents, i.e. 66.0 percent said that their awareness has increased to great extent and 33.3 percent of respondents reported improvements to some extent while only 0.7 percent of respondents have felt no improvement at all. This shows that adult literacy programs have increased the awareness of 99.3 percent of respondents about importance of cleanliness either to great extent or to some extent.

The fifth aspect regarding the awareness was the method of making ORS. The majority of the respondents i.e. 64.3 percent said that their awareness about making ORS has increased to great extent and 30.0 percent of respondents reported improvements to some extent while only 5.7 percent of respondents felt no improvements at all. This shows that 94.3 percent of respondents have reported improvements in their awareness about making ORS either to great extent or to some extent. The sixth indicator was the awareness about childcare. Majority of the respondents i.e., 56.7 percent said that their awareness about child care has increased to great extent and 36.7



percent of respondents stated that improvements were to some extent while only 6.6 percent of respondents reported no improvements at all. This describes that 93.4 percent of respondents have felt improvements in their awareness about childcare either to great extent or to some extent after adult literacy classes.

Figure 4 shows the learners' views regarding improvements in practicing the acquired knowledge. The first criterion in this regard was to measure the tendency to practice the knowledge acquired through adult literacy classes. In this regard, 42.0 percent of respondents said that they have practiced this knowledge to some extent and 41.0 percent of respondents stated that they have practiced to great extent while only 17.0 percent respondents reported that they have not practiced this knowledge at all. This shows that 83.0 percent of respondents have practiced the acquired knowledge either to great extent or to some extent. The second indicator was to measure the effect of this knowledge to improve health condition of learners. In this regard, 49.4 percent of respondents said that this knowledge has improved their health conditions to some extent and 42.3 percent of respondents reported improvements to great extent while only 8.3 percent of respondents have not felt any improvement at all. These results were consistent with previous studies which reported improved knowledge and awareness about health and increased utilization of health facilities (Berrera, 1990; Sentell & Haplin, 2006). Further the association of variables was measured through the Chi-square test.

Table 1  
Association between literacy skills and Life Skills

Literacy skills	Life Skills			Total
	To great extent	To some extent	Not at all	
To great extent	62	37	8	107
To some extent	34	84	42	160
Not at all	21	8	4	33
Total	117	129	54	300

Chi-Square Value = 48.997

Degree of freedom = 4

Level of significance = 0.05

Significant

Gamma Value = 0.28

The table No. 1 describes the association between literacy skills and Life Skills of rural women. The independent variable was literacy skills and dependent variable was Life Skills. The chi-square value shows that relationships are significant. The gamma value is positive which depicts



that relationship is direct. This means greater the level of literacy, better will be the Life Skills of rural women. The previous studies also described that adult literacy programs helped women and girls to enrich their mind about social and personal experiences and expands their knowledge to take better options for themselves and their children (Benseman, 2000; Farah, 2005; Rehman, 2008).

Table 2

Association between literacy skills and health conditions

Literacy skills	Health Conditions			Total
	To great extent	To some extent	Not at all	
To great extent	69	37	1	107
To some extent	59	93	8	160
Not at all	23	7	3	33
Total	151	137	12	300

Chi-Square Value = 30.166

Degree of freedom = 4

Level of significance = 0.05

Significant

Gamma Value = 0.23

The table No.2 describes the association between literacy skills and health conditions of rural women. The independent variable was literacy skills and dependent variable was health conditions. The chi-square value shows that relationships are significant. The gamma value is positive which depicts that relationship is direct. This means greater the level of literacy, better will be the health conditions of rural women. The previous studies described similar findings concluding that education affects women's beliefs about the good health, causes and cures of diseases that could increase the demand for utilizing the modern health care facilities (Sandiford et al., 1995; UNESCO, 2006).

### Conclusion and Recommendation

The result of this study depicts that the literacy skills of the learners have been significantly improved after participation in adult literacy program of Punjab Literacy and Non-formal Basic Education Department. Majority of women reported improvements in different aspects including their reading and writing skills, basic arithmetic skills, vocabulary, understanding of national language and currency notes. The adult literacy program has greatly increased learners' knowledge about various aspects of their life including religious rites and practices, history of



religion, cooking and home remedies. Further, the effects of adult literacy programs on learners' awareness about health problems, hygienic principles, self-medication, importance of cleanliness and childcare were also very significant. The syllabus of adult literacy classes provides enough knowledge to learners to improve their health conditions. The learners are practicing this knowledge in their real life, and it helps them to improve their health conditions. Further it is suggested that adult literacy programs must include some vocational or skills training so that learners may use it as a source of earning in time of need.

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