



LITERACY AS A PANACEA FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL
DEVELOPMENT: AN ANALYSIS

¹Ilegbusi Michael Ilofuan & ²Akande Faith
^{1&2}Department of Political Science,
Joseph Ayo Babalola University Ikeji Arakeji,
Osun State. Nigeria

Abstract

The little of this paper points to the magnitude of the problem, with which one cannot attempt to deal fully here because the problem keep on expanding especially among the third world countries. This paper does not replace the many technical studies already carried out on the topic. However, the paper try to give a general picture of the situation, as it endeavored to set out the facts, to show the complexity of the problem and to shed light on many correlations. The later part of the twentieth century has spotlighted the drama at modern man at grips with swift technological progress and an unprecedented diffusion of constantly renewed ideas experiments and techniques. Today, we are faced with a dilemma we must either find ways of mastering progress in all its forms in order to turn it into a means of liberation or else run the risk, in not adapting ourselves properly, of being submerged and enslaved by it. In fact, full utilization of human resources is the determining factor in development, whose ultimate aim is the betterment of man's lots.

Keyword: Literacy, panacea, socio-economic and technological development.

Background to the Study

To a great extent, the holding of the various world congresses of Ministers of Education on the eradication of illiteracy have been on eye opener to nations all over the world particularly the developing nations. It can also be regarded as profoundly significant events which while it would have been unthinkable even a few years ago, infact, form part of the logical sequence of history. It reflects the ever-growing awareness of the inter-dependence of peoples. In the face of an evil which directly affects over half the world's population, the other half cannot remain indifferent because it too is involved.

In its general context illiteracy is of course like a bottle-neck that hinders the attainment of all the objectives that different countries have set for themselves. A keen awareness of this fact has motivated the decisions on many occasions at the level of the international community and especially within the United Nations and UNESCO. Illiteracy is the outcome of a complex series of

economic and social factors and not simply educational ones. Illiteracy which is rife in less developed countries and is gaining ground despite all appearances owing to the combination of accelerated population growth and the inadequacy of educational network is widening the gap between the developed countries, which are making extremely rapid progress and the countries that are behind hand. The struggle against illiteracy is becoming increasingly inseparable from all the other efforts now being made to solve man's fundamental problems. Furthermore, and still in this same context, continuing adult education is one of the prerequisites of social progress. As it is generally acknowledged, literacy for its own sake is not worth the effort; but functional literacy instruction, viewed as an inseparable part of the process of adult education, is a normal factor in development. It enables the individual to fit into his occupational and social environment and helps him towards self-improvement which increases his value as a person and is one of the potential benefits of permanent education. It is intractably linked with development and is based on the objectives, which are to meet the needs inherent in the construction of national community.

As a parallel phenomenon, a multitude of efforts to plan education in line with development has been made throughout the world. Education is regarded increasingly as a safe and profitable investment, as well as an essential factor in the utilization of human resources for development. The task of planning education which has been imposed on countries by development requirements and the rapid progress of ideas and techniques and which is being undertaken with UNESCO's aid has not only revealed the connections between all forms of school and out-of-school education but also and more especially the basic link between the educational efforts in general and economic and social development.

It has been discovered that experience gained at the national and international level alike has slowly led to a more concrete and realistic approach to literacy and education in general. It has also enabled literacy to become gradually incorporated in the process of development in all its aspects, development of the individual and development of societies. It has confirmed that literacy is one of the decisive factors in the economic, technological, social and cultural advancement of a large proportion of the human race.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this paper is designed to evaluate literacy as a panacea for socio-economic and technological development in Nigeria.

Literature Review

World illiteracy is a problem known to be tremendous in scope and of the greatest importance but one which it is hard to define with any accuracy. The difficulty of defining it and seeing it as a whole is due to the fact that conditions vary from one country to another, and the type of literacy teaching called for, differs, accordingly. Moreover, the concept of literacy teaching itself has changed with time, and this complicates the question still further.

In everyday speech, which reflects the criteria used long ago, illiteracy usually means being unable to read or write and being cut off from the written word. Often, however, the ability to read is accepted as the basic test of literacy. Sometimes a person who can read and write his own name is said to be literate. The effort of these somewhat naïve criteria is still occasionally seen today in literacy programmes and in definitions of the magnitude of the problem of illiteracy. The fact is that any definition must take account of the general level of education as well as of the individual's place in society and the extent to which he takes part in public life. The experts committee on the standardization of education statistics which was convened in 1951 defined the literate person as one who can "both read with understanding and write a short simple statement in his everyday life". Acknowledge of the rudiment of arithmetic is often included in the attributes of a literate person. In view of the world's social and economic development, and especially the attainment of

independence by countries with high, illiteracy rate, the International Committee of Expert on literacy in Paris in June 1962, defined the literate person thus.

“A person is literate when he has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all these activities in which literacy is required for affective functioning in his group and community, and whose attainments in reading, writing and arithmetic make it possible for him to continue to use these skills towards his own and the community's development”. Here literacy far from being restricted to the minimum content is regarded as functional literacy, a notion which overlaps with that of continuing education. The concept of illiteracy and that of literacy not only change with time, but vary from country to country. Moreover, their content is growing wider. The main trend at present therefore is from elementary to functional literacy.

Whatever the historical or sometimes political reasons for the illiteracy and literacy situations may be, it is not difficult to see that the map of illiteracy coincides with that of underdevelopment. Illiteracy is, in fact both the cause and effect of underdevelopment. For underdevelopment is often an inseparable obstacle to the eradication of illiteracy whereas such eradication would facilitate the transition from a subsistence economy to a market economy and the exploitation of resources. Illiteracy is first and foremost the result of being behindhand in solving economic and social problems. And so illiteracy is also the result of special adverse circumstances, which hinders the development of school education. It should however be noted that although the inadequacy of the educational efforts made by government and administering authorities is in general the cause of illiteracy. A certain resistance on the part of the population has also played a part. In some cases the meagerness of the resources available makes it impossible to offer real openings to new literates and without such openings, there can be no adequate incentive to make the necessary efforts involved in learning to read and write: Sometimes certain religious beliefs, traditional forms of education or ritual initiations are obstacles to school attendance.

There is yet another and still more alarming problem. Despite the increase in the percentage of literates throughout the world, the absolute number of illiterates is constantly growing. The increase in school enrolment is not large enough in all countries, particularly the developing nations to meet the ever-greater needs created by the rise in the birth rate. At the same time, the shortcomings of adult education are such that, so far, it has proved impossible to reverse the trend as regards the absolute number of adult illiterates.

Illiteracy is simply a manifestation at the educational level of a complex series of economic, political, social, psychological and cultural factors which has prevented entire groups of human beings from participating in the process of development going on around them. Therefore, the eradication of illiteracy can never be brought about by a few educational measures, designed to impart elementary knowledge to adult illiterates. It must be secured by means of a political decision, taken in full knowledge of the causes and of the magnitude of the problem to remedy the situation and to rescue those who are suffering from such deprivation. It is not enough to call illiteracy a scourge, whilst taking symbolic action only. A government has but one choice: to take or not to take, decisive steps to eradicate it once and for all.

Relationship between Literacy and Economic Development

The value which literacy teaching seems to have as a development factor together with the principle of the right to education would appear to make universal literacy an eminently desirable aim. However, in view of the scarcity of resources common to all developing countries and the application of economic planning in order to allocate those resources in pursuance of the different objectives, a closer scrutiny of the above proposition is called for. It is a widely recognized generalization in dealing with literacy that the greater the problem, the less able the country is to finance it and the more acute are the competing demands on scarce resources. For the most part the

world map of illiteracy corresponds fairly closely with the world map of poverty.

There is definite relationship between literacy and development. Many representatives of the international community have repeatedly stated that economic development and social progress, an increase in average income and a narrowing of the gap between living standards in the developing countries and the developed countries were a matter of common interest. A solution of those problems has become an absolute necessity, and it is from this angle that the question of literacy must be tackled.

Considering the many aspects of development, there are five areas in respect of which literacy work seems capable of playing a vital role: modification of economic diversification, industrialization, rural development and transformation and the achievement of higher productivity. Literacy is in fact, will ensure the dissemination of the basic knowledge permitting wide and more effective participation in the development process and the acquisition of further knowledge, while promoting a change in mental attitudes and the creation of new behavior patterns posited by social and economic transformation. The nature and scope of the contribution made by literacy to this process will vary, however, according to the nature of the structures and environment concerned. For example, an economy undergoing industrialization or a predominantly rural society, a static socio-economic environment or a rapidly evolving one, an environment with a culture based on oral tradition or one with its own literate cultural background or one where the adaptation of alien institutions creates a cultural border, will tackle illiteracy with different styles and strategies.

Economic development calls, in the first place, for the reorganization of economic structures and for this something more than economic and financial intervention is needed radical changes in the social structure of the population and accelerate social mobility are also essential. Literacy will be a powerful instrument in effecting psychological conversion and will help to promote the necessary change. To a great extent, development means economic diversification. However, it is impossible if many factors operate to conceive of diversification of a national economy in a largely, illiterate society since illiteracy is always an obstacle, and often an insuperable one, to swift adjustment of new demands. Literacy teaching stands out not only as a rapid means of mobilizing the illiterate labour force but also as a way of facilitating the desired adaptation to development tasks.

Today many developing nations tend to speed up their industrialization process as one of the key factors in increasing the national income and absorbing increases in the active population. For these countries industrialization is the appropriate means of solving two crucial problems: first that of increasing exports and producing manufactured and semi-manufactured goods, secondly that of providing employment for the labour forces the relative demands for which decrease as agricultural techniques are modernized. The interdependence between these problems and literacy thus emerges very obvious. The contribution made by literacy largely depends, of course on its content.

A paramount aspect of economic development is increased productivity and in view of the special importance attached to it by all developing countries as a decisive factor in their rank and status in world economy it is proper that literacy should be considered from that standpoint. The increase in productivity resulting from literacy teaching is always difficult to assess and is essentially variable from case to case. Sometime, it is negligible and in extreme cases it may even be negative. Teaching adults to read and write by developing certain motivations but without satisfying the aspiration thus created may be tantamount to positively bad investment. But such cases aside, it certainly looks as if literacy is a factor in increased productivity, both through its direct and indirect effects on the new literates and through its effects on the community as a whole.

Apart from its direct effects on the worker, literacy undoubtedly has indirect effects as far as higher

education is concerned. For example, it makes it possible to increase output by employing equipment and techniques that illiterate workers would be unable to make use of. Furthermore, by ensuring a qualitative improvement in manpower, it enables economics to be made in higher grade staff. The fact that literate workers are able to read written instruction and have a better grasp of the nature of their work, will permit a saving of many hours of supervision work at overseer level or hours of organization work at the engineer level.

Generally, literacy appears to make the beneficiary more receptive and better integrated in the social and professional environment, give him a stronger sense of participation and an ability to assimilate new techniques or ideas which are themselves factors conducive to higher productivity.

The Connection between literacy and Technological Development

The concept of technology as broadly defined does not necessarily refer to hardware material. It is the totality of knowledge and skills embodied in people and institution which provides them with mastery over their natural environment. The practice of technology involves intellectual as well as manual skills.

Countries which today are at a high level industrially did not at the beginning of the modern era; have to solve technological problems similar to those now facing the authorities and people of the developing countries. In the case of the industrialized nations the progress of technology went hand in hand with that of education which gradually expanded and was adapted to the needs of economic advance. Today however, the developing countries cannot afford to wait until a gradual process of training through childhood to adolescence which will provide a labour force suited to the requirements of development has produced its effects while training the rising generations to meet new demands, they must without loss of time find large numbers of men and women capable of taking their places productively in this new economy, of appreciating its significance and its prospects of adapting themselves to its advance, and of constituting a great human reserve from which the future technological supervisory staff can be drawn.

The present emphasis on technology in developing and advanced nations is deliberate. It is correct to say that the explosive progress of science and technology up to 20th century and beyond brought prosperity and enriched the quality of life for mankind. The world is changing at a rapid pace, driven by science and technology and the challenges of integrating science and technology is getting increasingly complex. A technological breakthrough in developing economies can only occur through literate population. Technological development creates working conditions and requirements for adaptability on the part of the workers, both in agriculture, industries and bureaucracy, which can be met only by people belonging to a literate civilization.

The promotion of literacy therefore has a twofold function to fulfill in providing the knowledge and in creating the attitudes which will enable the adult members of the population to play their part in an environment marked by rapid technological progress. The training of highly qualified leaders and supervisory staff that will have to work in the midst of illiteracy obviously cannot provide the solution to the problem. It should be noted that when a literacy programme is being planned in a developing country it should be considered not as an effort to produce specimen types of modern industrial and agricultural workers but rather to create a new society of men and women capable of meeting the needs of technological development and supplying the labour force and the leaders for it.

Strategic Approaches to the Promotion of Literacy

In looking at the concept of education generally, one must be talking about the learning system. In other words it is the process of transmitting essential elements of the cultural heritage and development of skills which will provide a basic tool and framework for life-long learning outside

of the school system. In this process, it has the all-important task of awakening the individual to his or her own potentials and self-actualization (IlegbusiMichaelsIlofuan2013).

The transformation and revolution of any education system depend on the planning process. There are many approaches to the literacy problem. Most of the programmes to eradicate illiteracy, or at least a large number of them have been based on mass approach. This method being an attempt to bring as many adults as possible into classroom-type. Taking it as a basic assumption that every individual has a right to education and that it is in the general interest that all adult should become literate they have set out with that as their aim. In short, need and not resources has been the basic consideration. They have also been conceiving from the point of view of the aims to be achieved rather than from that of the returns to be secured. It goes without saying that setting aside a number of inducted successes a certain lack of balance between the two goals has made it difficult to carry out programmes of this type. Where planning is being done, however, the only logical position if the mass approach is adopted is to assign the necessary resources for the worth as a choice determined not purely by economic but rather by political and social considerations.

Some countries have attempted to adopt the strategic approach, especially the low income countries. Because of their scanty resources, most countries have confined themselves to small-scale experimental pilot projects which tend to serve as starting point for more general programmes. It has been shown that countries that place full reliance on elementary education as a long-term solution to the problem of illiteracy by ignoring illiteracy among adults and concerning themselves exclusively with providing adequate schooling for the children fail to consider either the economic advantages of adult literacy or the problem of maintaining literacy among children who live in an environment of illiterates. It is obviously necessary that any real effort to do away with illiteracy should go to the root of the problem and prevent the production of a new crop of illiterates. Any programme neglecting this precaution would certainly fail in the long run.

It should be stated here that to stake everything on the education of the young as a means of solving the problem of illiteracy on a long-term basis means neglecting the contribution to output that would come from the eradication of illiteracy among the economically active adults. Another important approach to the literacy problem and which has been advocated years back by UNESCO is the selective and the intensive approach. The basis for this approach is to link literacy work with development so that it becomes a form of functional education with strong motivations, taking economic criteria into account and aiming at quick results in economic and social development.

In view of the economic and financial circumstances of most developing countries, it seems logical to provide first for the instruction of those who can use literacy to the best advantage for the development of their country. This then means that the initial effort should direct at the active elements of the populations and should lead on to pre-service and or in-service vocational training. This also implies that instead of undertaking extensive programmes, effort will be concentrated on intensive programmes with the object of moving on from the rudimentary literacy stage to a real functional education. Infact the categories of people selected for this type of instruction should be those engaged in the productive sectors of the economy such as industrialization or rural development programmes, which can make notable contribution to the growth of their country, where literacy personnel appear to be indispensable.

The importance of education to the socio-economic political and technological development is well known. It is in recognition of this importance that the international community and governments all over the world have made commitments for its citizens to have access to education. It is an acknowledged fact across the globe that there are inequalities in educational access and achievement as well as high level of absolute educational deprivation of both children and adults. In order to confront this Challenge the Rights Based Approach which emphasizes the participation

of the citizens has been advocated. Meanwhile, the declaration of the World Conference on Education for all (WCEFA) which was made in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 stated clearly in Article that every person-child, youth, and adult- shall be able to benefit from educational opportunity designed to meet their basic needs.

This declaration was reaffirmed at the World Summit for children also held in 1990, which stated that all children should have access to basic education by the year 2000. The World Summit for children placed a lot of emphasis on raising the level of female literacy. In a bid to achieve education goals the Dakar World Education Forum was held as a follow up meeting to the WCEA where new sets of goals to be attained by the year 2015. The goals include

- a. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- b. Ensuring that by 2015, all children with special emphasis on girls, children in difficult circumstances have access to complete free and compulsory education of good quality.
- c. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are through equitable access to appropriate learning and skill give programmes (Olaleye 2014).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The problem of illiteracy is universal both in size and scope. Unless a solution is provided, mankind will be divided by an ever-widening gap between the educated peoples, with access to written knowledge and the largely illiterate ones. Just as the underdevelopment of certain countries acts as a brake on the development of the industrialized countries, so illiteracy.

It is thus in the interest of all that illiterate peoples should be taught to read and write, and it is the duty of all countries whatever their stage of development to carry out the task. To this end, foreign developed societies and countries are in position to render, such as the provision of higher specialized personnel and certain training facilities, the supply of certain types of equipment and all forms of cooperation, for the transmission of experience and technical knowledge concerning literacy teaching. This international cooperation should develop along both multilateral and bilateral lines, which will draw on both non-governmental and intergovernmental assistance.

References

- Adam C. (1973), "Educational Problems of Developing Societies" New York; Praeger Publisher
- African Development Bank (1998), African Development Bank report Oxford University Press.
- Anderson, A., Lynch, T (1988), New York: Listening Oxford University Press,
- Arnold, J (2000), "Seeing through Listening Comprehension exam Anxiety". TESOL. Quarterly, 34, 777- 786
- Akintayo, M.O & Ogenekohwo, P.E (2004), "Developing Adult Education & Community Development". New Paradigins Oyo State GAB Publishers
- Ayorinde, K. A. S (2013), "Sociology of Education: With a focus on Nigeria". Ilorin:Bluescores Publishers.
- Adebifa, O.A (1990), "Technology Policy in Nigeria (NISER) Ibadan
- Bailin. S. et al, (1999), "Conceptualizing Critical Thinking" Journal of Curriculum Studies

- Buck, G (2001), "Assessing Listening ". Cambridge University Press'
- Boyd, W. & E. J. King (1978), "History of Western Education" 15th edu. Akure, Nigeria: Fagbamigbe Publishers
- Babalola, J.B (2009), "Education that can raise Productivity in Nigeria Ibadan". A Awemark Publishers
- Babalola, J.B (2011), "Teacher Professionalism in a time of Global Changes Ibadan". His Linage Publishing House
- Balete, S. (2011), "Literacy Skills Training & Entrepreneurship Support for Rural Women in Ethiopia, Adult Education & Development, 77(1) pp67-80
- Conference on Technology Policy & Innovation (1998) Libson August 3-5
- Charalombos, U. (2009) ICT-Related Teacher Professional Development models & Strategies
- Fafunwa, A. B. (1967), "New Perspective in African Education", Macmillan (Nig) Ltd, Lagos.
- Federal Government of Nigeria (2004), "National Policy on Education (Revised Lagos NERDC)
- Gronin, B. (2000), "Knowledge Management organizational culture", Journal of Information Science, 27(3) 2001
- Durkheim, E. (1956) "Education & Sociology". Trans by Sheemond B. Fox, free Press, New York.
- L. Wilkes (1956), 'Teach Yourself to Teach' English, University Press London.
- Kenneth Strike (1982), 'Educational Policy & the just society Urbanar University of Illonois