

LITERACY EDUCATION: A VERITABLE INSTRUMENT FOR NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

The nature and quality as well as rapidity of human development are dependent on the type of education offered in any nation. Literacy education empowers individual, improves livelihood and assists in reducing the problem of unemployment in the society. The individual will be properly transformed through acquisition of literacy skills and will lead to national transformation in business, commerce, industry, office and the work force. This paper therefore examined the synergy between literacy education and national transformation. Literacy education was discussed. The challenges of literacy education, national transformation, literacy education and national transformation and limitations of literacy education in transforming Nigeria were also highlighted. The paper recommends that all stakeholders in education in Nigeria should encourage literacy education through promoting primary enrolment of all children in school irrespective of the income profile of the parents to achieve national transformation.

Keywords: Literacy, Education, Literacy Education, National Transformation, Literacy and National Transformation.

Introduction

Literacy education is more than understanding of the vocabulary of a written message. The reader must be able to understand the purpose of the message and appreciates the context that was conceived in; on the ground that literacy without critical understanding of the message is nothing more than noise in our ear. The importance and enormous benefits of literacy education both to individual empowerment and national development cannot be over-emphasized (UNESCO, 2020). Illiteracy remains a major problem, with estimate 76 million adults who cannot read or write. In addition to this, about 8.6 million Nigerian primary-age children are out-of-school (Opiah, 2022). The resulting effect of high illiteracy rates in Nigeria has resulted in rising unemployment, inequality, crimes, corruption, extreme poverty and hunger, reducing child and maternal mortality, and combating diseases such as human immunodeficiency virus/acquire immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and malaria. It has therefore posed great challenges to the existence of the individuals in particular and the nation in general.

A closer look at the geographical distribution, government, economy and value placed on education revealed that they are all responsible for the high illiteracy rate in Nigeria. For instance illiteracy is greater in rural area than in urban areas due to the fact that: The educational facilities are inadequate in the rural areas; there exist limited access to education for rural young people; and survival demands which make families keep their children out of school (Ogbonnaya, 2020). Other problems include – inadequacy of government involvement; lack of funds and the low priority accorded to adult literacy programmes by federal and state governments is a huge factor (Oyekunle, 2018 and Bassey, 2021). The most unfortunate thing in Nigeria is that policies are formulated, but never executed. Nigerian government has yet to support policy actions that will place adult literacy education in high priority in fund allocation.

Improving literacy education skills is cornerstone for improving individuals' capabilities and resilience, and achieving economic growth, social development and environment protection. It is the basis for lifelong learning and plays a crucial foundational role in the creation of sustainable, prosperous and peaceful societies. Literacy education is therefore a bridge from misery and hope. Transformation implies complete change from one situation to another. A total departure from the old order to a new one, it does not come accidentally, but through a deliberate effort of application of skills acquired (Idam, Ntui & Odwyer, 2015). National transformation to Edeh & Ajisafe (2015) implies fundamental change in the building block of a nation; change in the social, economic, infrastructure and political landscape of a nation. They went further to state that national transformation is a change or transformation into a better state. It is a process concerned with people's capacity in a defined area over a defined period to manage an induced positive change: In terms of ability to predict, plan, understand and monitor change as well as to reduce or eliminate unwarranted change. National transformation is therefore the collective effort to a particular nation put in place to attain a gradual growth or advancement.

Although Nigeria has made considerable progress towards Education for All, one of the strategies set up by the Nigerian government to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty, are the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. Towards the actualization of the objective, the Basic Education Act (2004) states as follows: Universal Basic Education (UBE) means Early Childhood Care and Education, the nine years of formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skill acquisition programme and the education of special groups such as nomads and migrants girls

child and women, Almajiris, street children and disable group (FRN, 2004). As stated in the act, UBE being universal is bound to carry every citizen along without exception. It is also expected to be free, i.e. without any payment and also compulsory, so as to achieve wider access and create equal opportunities among the people for the programme to achieve its purpose, it was adapted to the nine year programme of the basic formal education which is also synonymous to the programme of the non-formal education that literacy education happens to be one of its form (Obiozor, 2011 and UE, 2013).

Literacy education should be seen as continuous and not a sporadic process. It is time the Nigerian government takes the lead and become truly committed towards eradicating illiteracy (Obidiegwu, 2012). Corroborating with this view, Archer (2007) noted that literacy education should be seen as a continuous process that requires sustained learning and application. There is no magic line to cross from illiteracy to literacy. All policies and programmes should be defined to encourage sustained participation and celebrate progress achievement rather than focusing on one of provision with a single end point. This is why Obiozor & Obidiegwu (2014) advocated for more government commitment to literacy education on the federal, state and local government and communities levels. The collaboration, partnership networking and experience sharing among the stakeholders towards literacy education are very necessary in order to accelerate reduction in illiteracy rates in Nigeria. Literacy education is capable and has the ability if given rightful place, in providing individuals with the necessary application of knowledge, skills and attitudes needed in solving the problem of unemployment, inequality, crimes, corruption and so on in the country thereby lead to the transformation of individual and the nation. It increases productivity, incomes at work and facilitates everybody's participation in economic and social life. It implies that literacy education help to transform individuals by providing them with the skills and knowledge to raise their output and generate income.

The reasons for the failure of the nation in the area of literacy education were absence of long-term perspective, lack of continuity, consistency, commitment to the existing policies and absence of long-term programmes. Therefore, within the context of this paper, attempt will be made to address a holistic transformation of the Nigerian state through literacy education as discussed in the following sub-headings: literacy education, challenges of literacy education, national transformation and limitations of literacy education in transforming Nigeria.

Literacy Education

There is no gainsaying the fact that education is the bedrock in which a nation can develop. Literacy education being integral part of the general education and is designed also to contribute immensely to the development of the nation. According to Nyerere (1974) literacy is a tool, and described it as a means by which we can learn more easily. To him, literacy enables us to read the instructions that came with a bag of fertilizer, it enables us to read about new methods so that we do not have to rely on a facilitator being near; it enables us to study our party policy until we really understand it. And if we have not yet had the opportunity of learning to read and write we can still learn and we should still learn; if we do not want to be left behind as others are making progress.

Literacy education develops skills, knowledge and abilities needed in order to enable an individual function well in the society. It aids national transformation and growth; the nation and her citizen would not function successfully without a literate background. The citizen must possess the ability to read, write and calculate and socialize among each other to be able to plan, execute, monitor and attain success in government programmes and projects for the survival of the country. All the administrators, technocrat, policy makers and other stakeholders in every nation have literate background which enables them to function and contribute to the building of a great nation. This underscore the essence or significance of literacy for development in every nation, hence, there is nation transformation and growth (Osuola, 2004 and Obiozor & Obidiegwu, 2014).

Literacy education is not to award certificate alone, but also to train them to acquire skills to enable them function in their place of employment or vocation, satisfy the demand of their vocation, contribute to the economic growth of the society and improve the value of life. It is a form of education that aims at providing knowledge, developing skills and inculcating attitudes that are necessary to enter into and progress in an occupation. It is the key to manpower development. It enhances social-cultural reconstruction by helping recipients to acquire self-reliance, dedication, responsibility, rationality, and loyalty, a sense of co-existence, co-operation, fair-play and understanding.

To be literate is to be able to communicate with other persons through reading, writing and simple arithmetic. An acceptable literacy is a thorny issue that cannot be easily established for everybody because various people of various ages have different uses for it. According to Ojokheta and Eden (2021),

‘without the ability to read or write, many illiterate people become trapped in a cycle of poverty with limited opportunities for employment or income generation. The problem of illiteracy can be classified into two: basic illiteracy (those who are unable to read and write simple words) and functional illiteracy (those who may be able to read and write simple words, but cannot apply these skills to tasks’ p.3.

Poor quality education is leaving a legacy of illiteracy more widespread than previously believed and can be traced to: Population growth, ineffective literacy campaigns under investment in adult literacy programmes and inappropriate language offerings have contributed to this tepid progress. In addition, many communities and workplaces do little to encourage literacy and motivate learners to develop and sustain their literacy skills. More than 115 million 6-12years old are not in school in the developing world; three –fifths of them are girls; more than 150 million children in the developing world start school but do not complete four years; in sub-Sahara African only one in three who attend school complete a primary education; the situation is particularly poor in sub-Sahara Africa, North Africa, and the middle East, where proportionate more children are out-of-school than in other region (World Bank, 2003).

Many benefits abound if Nigerian youths and adults participated in literacy education. Among the benefits are:

- i. Literacy education empowers people. Adult especially, women, who take part in literacy education programmes, have better knowledge of health and family planning.
- ii. Literate parents are more likely to send their children to school and help them with their studies: A child born to a mother who can read is 50 percent more likely to survive past the age of five and assist in reducing out-of-school children.
- iii. Literacy education societies on political level. Literate people are found to be more critically engaged: Whether in labour unions, community activities or politics.
- iv. Drastic reduce of high rate of poverty and unemployment prevalence in the country. Literacy education can help substantially to reduce poverty through enhancing employment prospects and giving better chances of acquiring the tools for self-employment through the skills acquired from literacy education programmes needed to run their own lives. It has empowerment role in times of crisis, providing a stable community, a chance for re-orientation, a safe place and social recognition.
- v. Reduction of societal socio-economic problems (violence, stealing, crime, prostitution, street roaming among others) caused by idleness among the youths and adults.

- vi. It helps the youths to make informed decisions when they are still young and later when they are adults, consequently making them responsible citizens.
- vii. Literacy education is crucial for economic development and fighting poverty: Literacy has been found to have a positive effect on GDP per capital. If all children in low-income countries could read, it is estimated that poverty could drop by 12 percent (European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), 2015).
- viii. Political benefit: the empowering potential of literacy can translate into participation and contribute to the quality of public policies and democracy. Literate person are to some extent more likely to vote and voice more tolerant attitude and democratic values.
- ix. Post-conflict situations: Literacy programmes can have an impact on peace and reconciliation in post-conflict contexts. Mobilizing people's capacity for resilience by having them write down their experiences and share them with others helps those affected by conflict to come to terms with their problem and move forward in their undertakings.
- x. More productive: Adult learning can improve employability and income. It has an important role in maintaining, re-skills of those with the greatest need for support (EAEA, 2015).
- xi. Parents' educational support: Educational attainment in one generation has positive effect in the next generation. Parental education influence the children's performance in education, because they provide their children with educational support.

In essence, improved literacy education can contribute to economic growth; reduce poverty; reduce crime; promote democracy; increase civic engagement; prevent HIV/AIDS and other diseases through information provision; enhance cultural diversity through literacy programmes in minority languages; lead to lower birth rates as a result of increased education; and coffer personal benefits such as increased self-esteem, confidence and empowerment (Chowdhury, 2014). Nigeria should therefore, intensify efforts in providing literacy education that can contribute to economic growth; reduces poverty; promote democracy; just to mention but a few in our society.

Challenges of Literacy Education

The grave consequences of the neglect of literacy education that is already showing its ugly face include the following:

- i. 76 million adults, two-thirds of them are women, still lack of basic reading and writing skills (Opiah, 2022). Adult with lower literacy level are more likely to rely on people/public for assistance and this does not make for either personal or community development. A literate

adults (especially, women) are not only develop herself but also his children because she will be able to read to her children early in life.

- ii. Most of the countries had missed the Education for All on adult literacy. Some by a large margin of the 40 countries that had an adult literacy rates below 90 percent in 1998-2001, only three countries (Bolivia, Equatorial Guinea and Malaysia) are expected to meet the global of reducing their illiteracy rates by 50 percent (UNDP, 2014).
- iii. Illiteracy tends to prevail in low-income countries where severe poverty is widespread. Literacy is poorest in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia. By implication, adults with low level of literacy skills are likely to be living in poverty. This is because literacy education foster clear awareness about economic, social, political and ecological inter-dependence in urban and rural areas.
- iv. Progress is slowing, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected countries: Where 42 percent of the world's out-of-school children live (and this percentage is growing on daily basis). There is no doubt the fact that youth of today will be leaders of tomorrow; Countries with high percentage of out-of-school children would definitely affect the progress of the said countries. Literacy education should therefore be implemented to the letter to reduce out-of-school children in the affected countries.
- v. There is an acute shortage of facilitators in developing countries. For example, to achieve universal primary education, an additional 1.7 million primary school teachers are needed (Clement, 2004; UNDP, 2014). There is shortage of practitioners and personnel on literacy issues and education in developing countries (Nigeria inclusive).

National Transformation

Transformation means a complete change from one situation to another or a departure from old to a new one. Transformation means to metamorphose or a complete change from one situation to another, a total departure from the old order to a new one. The concept portends a radical, structural, and fundamental change that has the potential of altering the status quo under a given condition. Asobie (2012); Dakuku (2013) and Edeh & Ajisafe (2015) stated that transformation of a nation is about a new direction, new priorities and new projects. It is not an event rather a process leading to a new goals and new results. It is a process of profound and radical change that orients in a nation in a new direction and takes it to entirely different level of effectiveness. It implies a basic change of character and little or no resemblance with the past configuration or structure in a country.

Ibidapo, Adeowu & Balogun (2015) quoting Oladimeji (2008) noted that national development is used to mean not just improvement and advancement, but more of transformation of the economic, social and political structure of the Nigerian society from less complex, less efficient and less desirable to a more complex, more efficient and more desirable state. Ibrahim (2015) quoting Nasiru (2011) stated that national transformation is a complete change from one situation to another, a departure from the old order to a new one in a country. To change from a failure to successful, calls for performance of some activities that will facilitate the actualization of such changes, transformation call for practical action and goes beyond mere expression or verbal pronouncement, but requires a number of tasks to be performed by the country involved.

Transformation, if properly handled by a nation will definitely bring about human development. Human development to Ibiam and Ugboja (2008) aims at enlarging the capacities of people to live full, productive, satisfying and valuable lives by raising their income and improving other components of their living standards such as health, literacy, and control over their destiny in order to prolong their life span.

Limitations of Literacy Education in Transforming Nigeria

There are some problems that make it difficult to realize the full potential of literacy education programmes in Nigeria, prominent among them as stated by Olaitan (1996), Osuola (2004), Asuquo (2005), Oladepo, Bolade-Oladepo & Balogun (2015) and Oduoye (2019) are as follows:

- i. Inadequate funding, funds allocated to adult and non-formal education have been inadequate to meet the growing needs of literacy programmes. Formal education is much more favoured in the budgeting allocation of the government of Nigeria. This makes the implementation of the programme a little bit difficult. The effect of poor funding of this programme is evident in shortage of teaching materials; ill-equipped literacy centres; inadequate financial support for research and poor remuneration of facilitators. Government and Cooperate organisations should demonstrate greater commitment and will to fund literacy education to enable it bring about the desired transformation expected of this type of education. Poor funding by all levels of government is one of the most serious constraints militating against the successful implementation of literacy programmes in the country.
- ii. Inadequate research efforts and data. Inadequate research will definitely affect the progress of the programmes and will not give room to improved judgment about its effectiveness based on the outcome. More research work need to be carried out in the area of literacy education in order to achieve some of its aims and objectives as core engine of human development that aids capacity building. While government should utilize relevant research results in the area of literacy education already conducted.

- iii. Rarity of facilitator preparation programme. There is limited opportunity for training and re-training of facilitator of literacy education in Nigeria. Human being are pivot of work in any productivity venture. Well trained facilitators provide ideas, innovations that will bring about improvement in the life of adults. Tutors should therefore be properly trained to enable them acquire necessary skills, knowledge, abilities and competencies needed for the nature of their job.
- iv. Lack of continuity and consistency in government policy in Nigeria is a result issue and cog in the wheel of its implementation. A particular government may embrace policies on literacy education for sustainable development, while the successive government may not see the need to give attention. Invariably, this brings about frequent changes on policies on its implementation.
- v. Poor public attitude toward literacy education due to earlier mentality that literacy education programmes is meant for academic misfit. The understanding of the relevance of the programmes in the area of acquisition of the skills that boost individuals' potentials for economic empowerment, better livelihood and societal development will definitely change their orientation with the realization that it's the type of education that people should have, as long as they are alive regardless of the amount of their previous education.
- vi. Tutors inefficiency due to lack of insufficient commitment or dedication to work. It is regrettable that majority of facilitators operate on voluntary basis. This results to leaving the programmes to be handled by people who are not professionals in the field. This has turned out to be problematic on the ground that majority of them failed to attach the seriousness needed to literacy education making them to withdraw from the programme at will.

Conclusion

National transformation is a fundamental shift in the deep orientation of a nation, such that the world is seen in new ways and new actions and results become possible that were impossible prior to the transformation. Literacy education is known as a very effective instrument in the development of individual and society. In essence, it is the key to all development efforts in the sense that all facets of national development require human capital to bring skills, knowledge and capacities in order to record improvement. This paper reiterated the special value literacy education brings to national transformation. In order to enable the nation economy to be successfully transformed, literacy education should be viewed as an effective and veritable tool for national transformation and should be given the desired attention, support and encouragement needed.

Recommendations

To ensure that literacy education plays its roles in the process of national transformation in Nigeria, the following recommendations were made:

- Government needs to encourage literacy education through promotion of primary enrolment of all children in school irrespective of the income profile of the parents. Also, exposing the child to the power of literacy education at the earliest age plays a vital role in the choices they make later in their adult life. In addition, government should provide infrastructure such as classrooms in all the primary schools in the country, so as to ease over-crowding, increase access and reduce pupil/teacher ratio.
- Government and the organized financial institutions should consider playing better roles than before in granting loans for neo-literates to enable them be self-reliant.
- Government should enhance the efficiency, resourcefulness, and competence of facilitators and other adult educational personnel through training and re-training, capacity building, and motivation.
- Grassroots awareness campaign programmes should be put in place by the government, private sector and Nigeria National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) to enlighten Nigerian youths and adults on the meaning, scope, content, roles and benefits of literacy education to correct the wrong impression that it is education for less-privileged people.
- Government should increase funding of literacy education because of its importance in national transformation and thus required special kind of funding.
- The nation's literacy centres should be brought to international standard by employing professional facilitators to run the centres.

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