



Understanding the Meaning of Literacy beyond the 3Rs: Literacy and Paradigms of Development

Okemakinde, Sunday O. Ph.D;¹ Olajide, Muili F., Ph.D² & Olajide Fatahat Oyeteju³

¹ Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education, Adeyemi University of Education, Ondo, Nigeria

² Department of Continuing Education and Community Development, Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida University, Lapai, Nigeria

³ Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

*Corresponding email: muiliolajide842@gmail.com

Abstract

Traditionally, literacy is still universally defined as the ability to read, write and compute numeracy (3Rs). However, the meaning of the term has changed overtime due to dramatic changes in the area of social, economic, political and ecological changes taking place across the globe to a range of more complex and diverse skills and understanding. It is against this background that this paper examines the concepts of literacy and development, literacy beyond 3Rs: Literacy and development; literacy and lifelong learning; literacy and social change; literacy and cultural development; literacy and internet; literacy and politics; literacy and human right; literacy and employment generation and literacy and conscientization. On these bases, the authors recommended, among others, that government at all levels should create an enabling environment through the provision of adequate funding, materials and facilities required to educate adult members through literacy education in order to contribute to the development of their immediate environment and the country at large.

Keywords: Literacy, Development, Education, Adult, Developing Countries

Introduction

Literacy is the lifelong development of an individual who can display a broad range of skills, from reading, writing and counting to problem-solving and critical thinking. Therefore, for any meaningful development to take place in individual life, community or country, there is the need to acquire literacy education. To Edeh (2015); Azar and Tanggara (2022), literacy should no longer be a provision of literacy programmes. It should go beyond that and capture many other qualitative aspects, including improved ability to learn and increased life skills, skills to participate in the democratic process, and so on. Okemakinde and Ogunyinka (2016) also assert that literacy serves as a vehicle for the effective and efficient delivery of cultural, social, democratic, economic, environmental and political benefits.

One of the most neglected national resources in developing countries (Nigeria inclusive) to Oyewumi and Alumona (2016) are the adults. His need for education is second only to that of the school children. Adults with lower literacy levels are more likely to be reliant on people/the public for assistance, and this does not make for either personal or community development. The wealth creation opportunities for those who lack literacy skills are very limited because they are unable to



read classified advertisements, applications or gather the skills necessary to gain employment that pays well enough to make them self-sufficient. When an adult is literate, he not only develops himself but also his children because he will be able to read to his children early in life, thus equipping them with basic literacy skills before the real school life (Adedokun, 2015).

The objective of the process of literacy education is to get adults, either as individuals or as a group, to learn and, through learning to change their attitudes and behaviour (Adesokan & Olawuni, 2018). It involves a continuum of learning enabling individuals to achieve their goals, develop their knowledge and potentials and participate fully in their community and wider society. Literacy all over the world can be said to be geared toward national development. It is designed to meet the daily challenge of adults to get them out of the ignorance level, liberate them; to improve knowledge and skills, and change attitudes or behaviour. It is a basic tool for advancing the rights and privileges of all social groups, including marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Literacy serves as a way to bring about desired change in society. It can also contribute to the development of human beings. It promotes an increase in knowledge and skills, thereby encouraging positive and active engagement of adults in their own development and that of the larger society ranging from eradication of illiteracy, poverty, school attrition, unemployment, disease, and crime to humanity, just to mention but a few (Jinna & Maikano, 2014; Shamsideen, 2016). In essence, an individual who becomes literate has an immense intellectual and cognitive advantage and uses the advantage to develop socially, economically, intellectually and politically.

Development generally and national development to Adesokan and Olawuyi (2018) cannot be achieved without the active participation of the adult members of the society. To them, the participation of people in development efforts is made possible only when people know what to do and how to do it and have the urge to do it. To achieve these, adult members must be equipped with adequate knowledge, skills, values, and competencies through literacy education. This is unconnected with the fact that no nation can develop beyond its citizens' education level.

There is no doubt the fact that Nigeria, like most developing countries, placed undue emphasis on the formal school system while neglecting literacy education. Then the question is will literacy education brings about individual and national development? This paper, therefore, set out to examine the relevance of literacy education in the development of adult members of the society in particular and the nation in general.

Concept of Literacy

Conventionally, literacy refers to an individual's ability to read, write and compute. It is the type of literacy that enables people to read, write and do simple arithmetic in any language. However, in modern society, literacy encompasses much more than just these basic skills. It includes the ability to analyse things, understands general ideas or terms, uses symbols in complex ways, applies theories and perform other necessary life skills- including the ability to engage in the social and economic life of the society (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Oloyede, 2015).

To Odiaka (2018), it is a special form of education that is put in place to afford the adult learner the opportunity to optimize his or her potential and become relevant, productive and fulfilled socially, economically and intellectually. It is a multidisciplinary approach to learning aimed at solving adult learners' problems. Literacy will make people recognize the importance of listening and talking and



effective collaborative work in the development of critical thinking for personal and societal development.

Issues arising from the reconceptualization of literacy according to UNESCO (1997), Sarumi, Ojokheta and Adepoju (2007) & Omolewa (2015) include the following:

- i. Literacy aids capacity building; it's an enabling factor, the core engine of human development, and its impact must be seen in terms of benefit to communities and individuals;
- ii. This century presents a lot of challenges to the developing world as more skills are demanded to survive under a terribly poor economy. Hence, the dire need for functional income generating, capacity building, and computer, civic, environmental and global knowledge;
- iii. The unique quality of an individual should be recognized regardless of whether he or she can read or write; and
- iv. The newer technologies such as ICT, the internet and allied technologies should be used to build bridges between haves and have-nots.

The above revealed the need for a rethink on literacy as a tool for development. It has the potential to provide opportunities for dropouts, youths and adult illiterates to improve their self-esteem, acquire basic and life skills, provide employment and, more importantly, bring about individual and national development.

Development

A multitude of meanings is attached to the idea of development; this is unconnected with the fact that development is one of the most difficult concepts to define. This is due to the fact that it means different things to different people. In essence, the concept is complex. However, it can be defined as bringing about social change that allows people to achieve their human potential. According to Seya (2014), development is a process rather than an outcome. This is because it involves a change from one state to the other. In this circumstance, the change we are referring to is a positive one.

Literacy beyond 3Rs: Literacy and Development

According to Omolewa (2015), literacy has ceased to be merely about possessing the basic skills of reading, writing and the ability to compute. In the contemporary world, it is about providing individuals with the capacity for understanding their lives and social environment as well as equipping them with problem-solving skills. Literacy education, unlike education for the younger ones, is centred on the immediate needs and problems of the adults in their homes, social and occupational roles, civic and economic interests and therefore have an immediate direct positive relationship with development objectives at any level (UNDP, 2016; Adesokan & Olawuni, 2018). Hence, the need to talk about the use of literacy in the context in which it is going to be used.

1. Literacy and Lifelong Learning

The recommendations on literacy of the sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) held in Berlin, Germany, in 2009 stated that: literacy is an indispensable foundation that enables young people and adults to engage in learning opportunities at all stages of the learning continuum (UNESCO, 2009).



Lifelong learning implies that human beings learn throughout life, both in and out of school and long after schooling has ceased. It may be a case of continuous education, which enables individuals to acquire new knowledge and skills to cope with their professions' daily demands. It is a process without an end. It arises perhaps out of the awareness of the accelerated pace of changes in technology, communication and institutions which required human beings to update their skills and knowledge in order to keep them constantly alive. This may be due to the fact that education at the formal school level may not be sufficient in developing a full human being, especially as such education terminates at leaving school; whereas, as part of the goals of lifelong education will be to reinforce and improve the education of the young as well as to offer adults broad opportunities for self-renewal and social advancement (Braimoh, 1990); Patra, (2022). It, therefore, implies institutional provision of opportunities to continue learning. It may be one of recurrent education which enables individuals to return for education at various stages of their lives.

Literacy is the lifelong development of an individual who can display a broad range of skills, from reading, writing and counting to problem-solving and critical thinking. It is an important tool for the advancement of both formal and non-formal education. Literacy is continuous and contextual and takes place in and out of educational settings throughout life. Thus literacy is a basic requirement for lifelong learning.

2. **Literacy and Social Change**

Social change can be defined as the changes that have occurred in a society over a given period. These changes may be in the patterns of social interaction, social behaviour, social institutions and other social phenomena in society. The development of critical, analytical and problem-solving skills combined with reading and writing can be traced to Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, in his book titled *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1972). According to him, the main aim of literacy is empowering learners through creative and interactive literacy learning process to understand, act upon and transform the social order of injustice (Edeh, 2015).

Literacy promotes social change through political education, the exercise of franchise, confidentiality in their correspondence, transactions at banks, less dependency on others, and so on. There is no gain saying that no nation can eradicate ignorance, social injustice, poor sanitation, just to mention but a few without referencing literacy education (Omolewa, 2015).

3. **Literacy and Cultural Development**

Cultural literacy is the ability to understand the similarities and differences in the customs, values and beliefs of one's culture and others (Oloyede, 2015). Literacy must be seen as an activity embedded in cultural practices which could bring about cultural transformation. It introduces every member of society to those things they need to know about their people and society (Biao, 2015). It is important for the promotion of the whole man, character, mind and soul.

4. **Literacy and Internet**

The 'internet' refers to an 'international network' and is an educational medium that has accelerated learning among children, young and adult learners. Internet literacy involves the new tools of hypertext, multimedia and electronic forms of synchronous and asynchronous communication. Internet has made communication very easy and also made it possible for marketing to take place with minimal effort.



To survive in the present-day globalized world, the workforce who wish to succeed in their areas of practice should learn about internet-related expressions and practices and must be functionally literate to be able to cope with modern technologies and production techniques. This is important because literate persons are able to access technological innovations, which eventually speed up the growth of development.

The best way to achieve a literate workforce is to be computer literate (ability to use a computer and its software to accomplish practical tasks) and use new media such as the internet to access and communicate information effectively. To Odiaka (2018), all distance learning programmes in Nigeria's various institutions use the internet for lecturing, training, examination and participants' continuous assessment.

5. **Literacy and Politics**

Political literacy equips individuals with the ability to discern technicalities in political party formation, the rule of political operations and the spirit and techniques of politicking (Biao, 2015). Adult is expected to participate in politics and, understand the dynamics of democracy, preserve the environment for sustainable development.

6. **Literacy and Human Right**

The Hamburg Declaration states under Resolution 11 'Literacy, broadly conceived as the basic knowledge and skills needed by all in a rapidly changing world, is a fundamental human right' (UNESCO, 1997). Where literacy as a right derives from the right to education, it is seen more as a set of skills that constitute fundamental or basic education. In line with the above, Adepoju (2006) stated that literacy is a right. It is implicit in the right to education. It is recognized as a right, explicit for both children and adults. In view of this, literacy will make people conscious of their rights, thus preventing human rights abuse. To him, if literacy is thus valued, compliance with its recognition as a human right is the basis for the achievement of EFA goals. And attribution of responsibility for human rights violations when denied access to it is a powerful lever for change.

7. **Literacy and Employment Generation**

Literacy is at the centre of initiatives to remove inequitable distribution of wealth. It is designed to improve knowledge and skills, and to change attitudes or behaviour (Mbalisi and Oyebamiji, 2015). It enables an individual to possess the knowledge, skills and abilities to cope with new processes and production techniques. It improves employability of individuals' participation in learning, and brings about higher wages and income from the improved basic skills gained. In essence, it will help individuals to learn current methods of production, which will enable him/her in particular and the nation in general to break even.

8. **Literacy and Conscientization**

Conscientization is the process of developing the individual's consciousness towards the problems which need to be addressed by an individual. The process involves understanding, clarifying, describing and explaining activities. Facilitating and enabling people by sharing ideas through dialogue to understand their problems or experiences in their participation process helps to transform those ideas and experiences into new knowledge for the people. Dialogue in this context involves a two-way process of interaction between the person who intends to hear and encourage others to talk about their experiences, ideas, feelings, problems, hopes and so on and the people being encouraged, in a non-authoritarian relationship (Asnarulkhadi, 2015). To this end, development must



be initiated out of the free will of man and man must control it for the advantage and final enjoyment of man.

It is noteworthy, at this juncture, that any of the above types of literacy may be employed to chart a path of development in Nigeria based on the fact that such literacy project is piloted and guided by a clearly defined development objective. This is in line with the submission of Biao (2015), who stated that 'if literacy projects seem to be failing, it is because they are yet to be properly planned through the selection of an adequate developmental theory or development paradigm that is expected to serve as a compass to them just as the sailor's compass guides the ship through its course on the wide sea' (p.63).

Conclusion

Literacy is an instrument that brings change to the whole society at large in terms of eradicating illiteracy and giving everyone the opportunity to be self-reliant and to have self-confidence. It remains a form of education that can fill the gaps created by the formal school system. In order to ensure personal and societal advancement in a developing country like Nigeria, literacy remains a rich source to tap from. The present high rate of illiteracy, unemployment, social problems, issues associated with democracy with democratic governance, and so on can be addressed through literacy education in Nigeria since it has helped developed countries in human capacity development.

Recommendations

From the above conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

- i. All stakeholders in the area of literacy education should be properly mobilized to embrace the programmes so as to achieve the desired results.
- ii. Government should carry out adequate sensitization to get people aware of the relevance of literacy education to individual and national development.
- iii. Urgent and similar attention given to formal education by all levels of government is needed to support literacy education in the country.
- iv. Regular dialogue and networking among literacy-related government agencies to share information and experiences for more integration is needed.
- v. Government at all levels should create an enabling environment through the provision of adequate funding, materials and facilities required to educate adult members through literacy education to contribute to the development of their immediate environment and the country at large.

References

- Adedokun, M. O. (2015). Literacy: A vital instrument for personal and community development. In Haladu, A. A.; Ojokheta, K. O. and Olojede, A. A. (Eds.). *Literacy for Sustainable Development in a Knowledge Economy*. Essays in honour of Professor Rashid Adewumi Aderinoye. Ibadan: Crafted and Bound Wordwork. 67-74.



- Adepoju, T. (2006). Right-based approach to literacy education in Nigeria: An appraisal. In Okediran, A. (Ed.) *Adult and Non-Formal Education in Nigeria: Emerging Issues*. Papers from the NNCAE Annual Conference Ibadan, Nigeria. November 27- December 1, 2005. Ibadan: Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE). 443-449.
- Adesokan, K. S. and Olawumi, A. O. (2018). Socio-economic development of developing countries: The role of adult education. In Kazeem, K.; Aderogba, K. A.; Ogidan, O. T. and Oni, M. B. *Understanding Adult Education Practice in Nigeria*. Essays in honour of Professor Kehinde Oluwaseun Kester. Ibadan: John Archers (Publishers) Ltd. 92-103.
- Asnarulkhadi, A. S. (2015). Literacy and Conscientization: Community development as a medium to empower the people. In Haladu, A. A.; Ojokheta, K. O. and Olojede, A. A. (Eds.). *Literacy for Sustainable Development in a Knowledge Economy*. Essays in honour of Professor Rashid Adewumi Aderinoye. Ibadan: Crafted and Bound Wordwork. 101-113.
- Azar, A. S. and Tanggaraju, J. (2020). Motivation in second language acquisition among learners in Malaysia. *Studies in English Language and Education*. 7(2). 323 – 333.
- Biao, I. (2015). Literacy and paradigms of development. In Haladu, A. A.; Ojokheta, K. O. and Olojede, A. A. (Eds.). *Literacy for Sustainable Development in a Knowledge Economy*. Essays in honour of Professor Rashid Adewumi Aderinoye. Ibadan: Crafted and Bound Wordwork. 51-66.
- Braimoh, D. (1990). *Principles and practice of adult education*. Ibadan: External Studies Programme, Adult Education Department, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- Canadian Council on Learning, (2007). *State of learning in Canada: No time for complacency*. Ottawa. www.ccl-cca.ca. Retrieved on 12/9/2017.
- Edeh, J. (2015). Viewing literacy beyond the 3Rs: Emerging trends in its conceptualization. In Haladu, A. A.; Ojokheta, K. O. and Olojede, A. A. (Eds.) *Literacy for Sustainable Development in a Knowledge Economy*. Essays in honour of Professor Rashid Adewumi Aderinoye. Ibadan: Crafted and Bound Wordwork. 149-163.
- Freire. P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Jnna, Y. J. and Maikano, P. N. (2014). The role of adult education in national development. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 32. 35-42.
- Mbalisi, O. F. and Oyebamiji, M A. (2015). Adult education for meaningful socio-economic development in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Science Studies*, 2(2). 199-213.
- Odiaka, S. I. (2018). The media and the development of adult education in Nigeria. In Kazeem, K.; Aderogba, K. A.; Ogidan, O. T. and Oni, M. B. *Understanding Adult Education Practice in Nigeria*. Essays in honour of Professor Kehinde Oluwaseun Kester. Ibadan: John Archers (Publishers) Ltd. 51-63.
- Okemakinde, S. O. and Ogunyinka, K. O. (2016). The concept and scope of adult and non-formal education in Nigeria. In Jayeola-Omoyeni; Ambode, A. A. and Okemakinde, S. O. (Eds.) *Contemporary Issues in Adult and Non-Formal Education*. Ibadan. Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo. 1-17.
- Oloyede, D. O. (2015). Literacy and human development in Nigeria. In Haladu, A. A.; Ojokheta, K. O. and Olojede, A. A. (Eds.) *Literacy for Sustainable Development in a Knowledge Economy*.



- Essays in honour of Professor Rashid Adewumi Aderinoye. Ibadan: Crafted and Bound Wordwork. 114-128.
- Omolewa, M. A. (2015). Impact assessment of pro-literacy worldwide and university village association collaboration. In Haladu, A. A.; Ojokheta, K. O. and Olojede, A. A. (Eds.) *Literacy for Sustainable Development in a Knowledge Economy*. Essays in honour of Professor Rashid Adewumi Aderinoye. Ibadan: Crafted and Bound Wordwork. 1-15.
- Oyewumi, C. F. and Alumona, M. N. (2016). An overview of adult education: Nigerian experience. In Jayeola-Omoyeni; Ambode, A. A. and Okemakinde, S. O. (Eds.) *Contemporary Issues in Adult and Non-Formal Education*. Ibadan. Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo. 227-240.
- Patra, I. (2022). Scrutinizing the effects of e-learning on enhancing EFL learners' reading comprehension and reading motivation. *Education Research International* <https://hindawi.com>. Retrieved on 21/6/2022.
- Sarumi, A. A., Ojokheta, k. and Adepoju, T. (2007). Rethinking literacy, education and social development in Nigeria. *Ghana Journal of Literacy and Adult Education* 3(2).
- Seya, P. T. (2014). Adult education and African development in the context of globalization. <http://www.dvv-international.de/index.php?article-id=230&clang=1>. Retrieved on 25/4/2019.
- Shamsideen, S. A. (2016). The role of adult education as catalyst for social change in Nigeria. *Pyrex Journal of Educational and Reviews*. 2(2). 10-14.
- UNDP, (2016). Human Development Report 2016: Human development for everyone. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>. Retrieved on 25/4/2019.
- UNESCO, (1997). Literacy in the world and its major regions. Hamburg: CONFINTEA V.
- UNESCO, (2009). CONFINTEA VI: Harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for viable future. Belem Framework for Action.