

# LITERACY AND LIFELONG EDUCATION AS A STRATEGY FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

Language is a means of communication being an art developed and fully used only by human kind. Without language life becomes meaningless and not worth living because communication either in writing and or in speech is made possible by the use of language. Any language is understood and used better when the users are literate. Literacy is the ability to read, write, compute, communicate, understand, interpret and create using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Lifelong education is the functional education given and utilized from the cradle to the grave. Lifelong education connotes the type of education received which has an everlasting effect and which lends itself to change for the continued relevance of the recipient and the education. This paper in addition to examining the basic concepts delved into the problems facing literacy and lifelong education to include among others, misplacement of priorities, inadequate effort on Mass Literacy Campaigns and implementation, corruption and so on. The paper went further to recommend some ways forward which include full scale mass literacy programme, use of the each-one-teach-one strategy in Adult Literacy education, need for government to clearly prioritize its programmes according to needs and availability of fund as well as involvement of women with integrity in sensitive positions to avoid monumental fraud and corruption which presently eats deep into the fabrics of our nation.

Nigeria used to be among the countries of the world with highest number of illiterates. Imhabekhai (2009), reported that in most developing countries including Nigeria, illiteracy rates is as high as 70% of the population. This means that at this time when information, communication and technology rules the world the literacy level in our country tends not to support development. Information and messages can most effectively be communicated to people through newspaper, broadcasts, books and other Media and such information can only be assessed by those who are literate. If the reverse is the case the implication is that the greater majority whom the messages are meant for cannot assess or receive such messages for proper utilization. The level of illiteracy affects educational, social, economic, religious, political and even cultural developments. In the midst of such level of illiteracy, the workforce will either be stagnant or most unproductive. This is because the surest route to development should be through education. Government should have keen interest in development using education sector as a vital tool. Functional curriculum will help the citizens realize their potentials for literacy and lifelong education.

The eight point agenda of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) were developed to reduce the complex of conditions that contribute to the vicious circle of poverty, low income; gender based negativism, poor health facilities, and wrong use of resources, high mortality rate and high degree of prevalence of HIV and AIDS in our society. Every aspect of these facets of poverty is connected to illiteracy status of the nation. Without effective integration of literacy and lifelong education not much can be realized as Literacy and lifelong education form the ladder for climbing the giant tree of our national transformation. Happing on the need for literacy and lifelong education, there organized the two World Conferences on “Education For All” (EFA), held in Jomtien, Thailand 1990 and World Education Forum in Dakar 2000. The quest for an increase of human capital has brought to lime line the urgent attention to the challenges of Education For All. The Federal Government of Nigeria in her National policy on Education (2004:9) seem to see the very need for EFA and so prioritize education thus:

1. Education is an instrument for national development.

2. Universal basic education in a variety of forms depending on the needs and possibilities shall be provided for the citizens.
3. Effort has been made to relate education to overall community needs.

This proposal of government is tailored to building knowledge on the area of needs which human resource cannot be isolated. For this reason literacy skill should be emphasized as a basic rudiment of lifelong adjustment to prosper and propel citizens to function in this global society where technology rules the world. The dividends of the digital age will be fully harnessed by a country like Nigeria for a stable transformation if literacy and lifelong education is enthroned in the country.

It is pertinent to acknowledge the various efforts made by the federal government, on the relevant developmental issues in a bid to promote national transformation including Mass Literacy. In line with this, the United Nations Organization (UNO) declared September 8 of every year as the International Literacy Day (ILD), set aside to draw the attention of governments, non governmental agencies, private individuals and organizations on the need to provide literacy education to all people who can neither read nor write including those who need to improve their literacy level. This also calls for the active involvement of those mobilizing, sensitizing and conscientizing the citizens to use appropriate strategies geared towards achieving the objectives of using literacy in achieving the transformation goals of the nation.

Much is still needed to be done on the area of promoting literacy as key element of lifelong learning through extension education services. The world declaration of Education For All (UNESCO, 1990) was conceptualized on four basic learning needs of: learning to know, to do, to be and to live. Literacy was also recognized under formal and non formal education for all, as the most readily available means to reach the children, youths and adults. In the same vein Dario (2006), commented that this concept along with four pillars of education learning to know, to do, to be and to live together, proposed by the International Commission on the Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in 1996, is reflected on a solid link with lifelong learning and the core contribution of literacy which is achievable through well structured and planned formal and, Adult and Non formal education.

Since the ability of a country to attain economic growth and development of material resources is rested on the quality of human resources, which in turn is determined by the education industry, Eya(2006) and Imhabekhai (2009) were of the opinion that when human resources are available but not in right quality and quantity, production seems to be affected. For this reason our digital age requires properly literate human resources to enable proper implementation of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) of the government.

One of the major tools to realize the MDGs is lifelong education. The term lifelong education refers to education from the cradle to as long as one breathes. It implies that since human beings are factors of social change it then requires that the existing skills and knowledge should be updated. Functional literacy and language education are keys to such change that can transform the society.

### **Lifelong Education**

The term lifelong connotes an everlasting effect on something while lifelong education entails education from the cradle to the grave. This emphasizes the need of accepting change if man must follow the intricacies of the changing world as it applies to knowledge and skill, culture, and technologies. Man therefore must continually upgrade self through lifelong education. As the day passes by knowledge keep unfolding while old ideas drift into obsolesce thereby calling on man to update his knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to be functional in the society. Lifelong education takes care of this as it has no age barrier and encourages success for human upliftment. Eya, (2010) saw lifelong education as a better alternative to formal education since it not only reinforces and improves the education of the young but

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also provides some wider opportunities for self renewal and self fulfillment. UNESCO, (2001), went as far as propelling the concept of lifelong education to integrate education in a wider perspective devoid of age barrier. It provides a continuing and lasting opportunity of education and replaces education deficiencies in the individual. This further explains learning in a dual capacity: learning for the sake of learning and learning for application in a broader perspective. In either case literacy is prime factor for effective learning and application. Literacy education is very important in every nation.

### **Literacy Education**

The federal government has sensitively acknowledged the role of literacy education in national transformation through answering the clarion call from International Appeal and Advocacy on human development and bringing same to bear on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with Education For All (EFA) as part of the agenda. In 1951 UNESCO committee came out with the definition of a literate to mean a person who can understand, read and write a short statement on daily life. This involves perceiving literacy from its literal point of view. For the purpose of this work, the concept of this work has moved from mere reading, writing and calculation to application and manipulation of digital technologies e.g computer, cell phones etc.

In terms of education, literacy is applied to standard of attainment to certain level of formal education. With this a person who has acquired certain standard in education be it in adult classes, or conventional school system is considered to be literate.

In the words of Chojis and Baget (2010), literacy is seen as acquisition of competency in language or communication, which means that a person can be said to be literate when he has acquired the essential knowledge and skill which enables one to partake in activities that require literacy leading to proper functional living and geared towards national transformation. Literacy has been also viewed by Babangida (2010), as the skill of transmitting and receiving messages in an intellectual manner. This reflects literacy on a higher level than just the skill of reading and writing. It is rather the ability to do both, and at the same time use the skill intelligibly in solving the problem of daily life. This view is also supported by Oxenham (2008), where literacy is defined as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy here entails a continuum of learning that enables an individual achieve aspired goals of developing knowledge and potentialities for the purpose of societal participation in achieving national transformation.

In the interest of national transformation literacy is seen to be synonymous with lifelong learning and language, all bearing the capacity and strength to equip the citizens with skill of reading and writing. When the greater percentage of the citizens of the nation become literate, such emerging problems like ignorance, misconception of ideas, conflicts, crisis, insecurities, atrocities, misinformation will pave way for harnessing national goals and aspiration. In recent times the emphasis and national consciousness on issues that has to do with computer literacy, information communication technology, (ICT), Global learning, Electronic transaction, Electronic learning up to Electronic banking stands a priority and privilege derived from proper literacy status of the citizens and the nation at large. The major desire of government in embarking on government programs like literacy is to liberate man. It is also the acquisition of literacy that give people the lifelong tool with which to attain a real share in national transformation. Literacy serves as an instrument for social continuity and cohesion. Literacy also serves as an instrument for social mobility, which is required in transformation of a nation like Nigeria.

For national transformation to thrive well there must be an accepted language of communication for a particular group of people through which literacy should be conveyed. There is need for national consciousness which literacy stands to uphold. For transforming a nation like Nigeria that has numerous languages there should be need to emphasize literacy for its liberal and unifying nature. Literacy also

mobilizes people for effective participation needed to propel development. Mobilization is a campaign designed to activate the masses into the process of change for better living. This entails activating resources in joint effort for operation, taking appropriate dimension in cognizance of the nature of the society. To achieve this there should be proper communication and comprehension which is achievable when literacy education takes its rightful place.

### **Literacy and Language Development**

According to Oxford Dictionary (1999), the term language is described as the system of communication in speech and writing that is peculiar to a particular group. Language encompasses words and sounds which in essence is to communicate, to relate and to identify. Once a message is transmitted and comprehended such message is said to have been communicated. In Nigeria today, literatures have revealed that Nigeria is endowed with numerous languages arising from varied ethnic groups. In Nnamani(2012), Nigerians communicate with as many as 395 languages, while some writers put it to about to 400 languages. In the view of Bamgbose, (1992), the number of languages used in Nigeria amounts to 513. In the real sense of it communication as it implies to language no human being can be fluent in all the languages this calls for a generally accepted language as a means of communication to enhance literacy and for national transformation. In a country like Nigeria endowed with multilingual nature it will be unreasonable to adopt one particular language looking down on others and that is why Aigbomian,(1991), stresses that no greater injustice can be committed to a particular group of people than to deprive them the opportunity or access to their own language which in Nigeria is justified by inheriting the colonial language for the entire nation for national growth and development. This has been the contention of the federal government of Nigeria in National Policy on Education (2004), demonstrating the expedient need for national unity through a common language of the nation. Nnamani (2012) commented on equal validity of all Nigerian languages in terms of law and constitution. He warned that any attempt to impose any particular tribal language or languages on the citizens of the country is flouted with grave danger for the peaceful development of the federation. This supports the use of English language as the official and world language of communication instead of a special attachment on one of the local languages, to ensure enhanced national unity, peace and empowerment geared towards national transformation. Literacy according to UNESCO (2004) has to do with:

... and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying context. Literacy involves a continuity of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potentials and to participate fully in their community and wider society.

Looking at the definitions language and literacy has a lot in common and as such the mastery of one helps in the full development and competence in the other. It may not just be enough in the present world to have a spoken language with which to communicate orally. It is expedient to also be able to speak, read and write such language if one must live functionally in any society of our time. In this case language and literacy becomes interwoven and intrinsically intertwined in the development of the individual persons which in turn transforms the society or the nation. The present belief that the more literate a nation is, the more her development finds a backing from the recent literacy table published by the Human Development Report (2011) as shown in the next page:

### Literacy Table of Some Countries

S/N	COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE LITERACY	S/N	COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE LITERACY
1	Angola	70%	9	Mali	26.2%
2	Benin Republic	41.7%	10	Namibia	88.5%
3	Brazil	90%	11	Nigeria	66.6%
4	Cameroon	67.9%	12	Senegal	49.7%
5	Cuba	99.9%	13	South Africa	88.0%
6	Equatorial Guinea	90.4%	14	United Kingdom	99%
7	Gabon	87.7%	15	USA	99%
8	Kenya	84.2%			

Adapted from: Human Development Report (2011)

From the above literacy table it can be perceived that the higher the literacy level of a country, the more likelihood of the country's individual and collective national development. Given the state of Nigeria, the secret of the transformation of the country is in the literacy rate. There is an urgent need unlike before for Mass Literacy. The yearning for Literacy For All must be intensified more than ever before if the country must embrace and keep pace with any transformation agenda of any government. When high level literacy is achieved, the vehicle that carries development, which is language, will grow and sustain transformation. Language and literacy form part and parcel of the national transformation agenda.

Literacy emancipates human beings, liberates the soul and develops the capacity for political, social and economic participation; situations in which illiterate persons cannot comfortably find themselves. When one becomes literate, one stops living in ignorance, superstition and fear. Literacy equips someone to be psychologically alert, mentally viable and socially acceptable. The individual in these states would in turn live effectively and contribute gainfully for the society and so create room for national transformation and development.

### Problems Encountered by Literacy and Lifelong Education in Achieving National Transformation

Literacy and lifelong education just like any other educational strategy has some observable drawbacks. Oghenekohwo (2006), has vehemently lamented on government approach in utilization of resource allocation which gives room for lapses in government funding of literacy and lifelong programs proper national transformation. Secondly much has been said and seen in the total neglect of the implementation of adult literacy strategy of each-one-teach-one due to government epileptic implementation of policies and programs. There cannot be observable national transformation under this condition.

Equally disgusting is lack of priority of needs on the part of government in the full implementation of vital policies and programmes. Government usually bite more than it can chew at a time thereby recording a number of unaccomplished programs and with this not much can be achieved in moving the nation forward .

Embezzlement and diversion of fund made available to literacy and lifelong education poses a threat to national transformation. A country's development cannot forge ahead under this condition where embezzlement is the order of the day.

There is serious gender imbalance in the appointment to sensitive national offices. Women up till now are not properly given key positions for integrity to be restored and justice to reign in this country. So how can national transformation be realized under the present condition.

## **Conclusions**

The present national transformation agenda which is a prerequisite to national development cannot assume a comprehensive dimension without involving radical literacy and lifelong education. The centrality of literacy and lifelong education as integral part of adult education stands the surest linkage of national development to all the youths and adults who have direct stake in the transformation process. For a more functional, rational and all involving and productive national development in Nigeria, literacy and lifelong education holds the key.

## **Recommendations**

To achieve national transformation much is needed as it entails a totality of positive response to change which success lies majorly on government not only to release enough resources but also to ensure proper supervision of her policy implementers.

Equally important is the revival of adult education literacy strategy of each-one-teach-one, to properly harness the benefits of adopting literacy and lifelong education for real national transformation.

There should be total revival and pursuit of the campaign for Mass Literacy, skill acquisition and continuing education programs. Like Universal Basic Education, Mass Literacy and lifelong education programmes should be vigorously pursued for rapid national development which in turn leads to national transformation.

Government should prioritize her sensitive programmes for the country and adequately fund them to move the nation forward rather than wasting such fund on less relevant issues such as bogus un-scaled pay to big politicians. Education being the vehicle for national development should be roundly revisited with a view to transforming the sector. When this is done, other sectors of the economy will experience rapid transformation. In so doing national development will no doubt be the order of the day in our nation.

Women should be given further chances in implementation of sensitive programs as was the case of Prof. Dora Akunyili, Oby Ezekwesili, Ngozi Okonjo Iwuala and others like them who had brought sanity to our nation while in office. Appointment/election of more women of integrity will help to promote national transformation as our men seem to be failing in their duties to the nation. The recent appointment of the first woman Attorney General and Chief Justice of the Federation which took place on the 17th of July 2012, just a day or so to the commencement of this all important National Conference is a welcome development in our nation's transformation agenda.

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