

# **LITERACY AND READING IN NIGERIA**

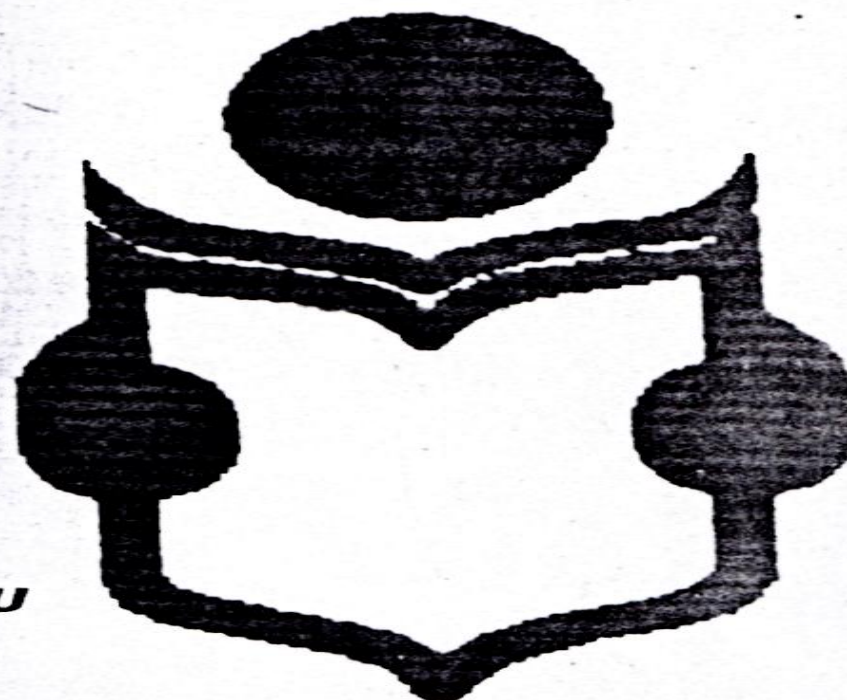
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# DIMENSIONS OF LITERACY FOR ALL BY THE YEAR 2000: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION AND MEDIA DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

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## ABSTRACT

Literacy for all by the year 2000 demands expanding the narrow scope of print literacy. The effective functional Nigerians require to be visually literate, computer literate and environmentally literate. Relevant recommendations for teacher education and instructional materials design and utilization include removing education of children aged six months to fifteen years from the concurrent list, training and better motivation of relevant personnel, expanding teacher education and general studies programmes to take care of all four dimensions of literacy.



## INTRODUCTION

In spite of developments in science and technology that have jointly contributed significantly to man's ability to plan ahead, the problem of educating today's youths for an uncertain tomorrow has persisted. Building of scenarios, trend extrapolations, crystal-ball gazing and the delphi techniques have not been always successful in providing accurate data and information inputs for futuristic planning. Yet the education sector must plan ahead. Therefore to successfully extrapolate, a wider scope must be given to variables of focus. That underscores the reason why literacy for all by the year 2000 and beyond must be given a wider dimension than the mere ability to read and write that has over the years constituted the major focal point of literacy programmes.

Functional print literacy which has been adequately emphasized by the various programmes as encouraged by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981) through the National Policy on Education (NPE) is not the solution because it is usually limited. The application of reading and writing abilities to daily functional activities of the individuals thus making them more useful to themselves and to the society is too limited for Nigerians of the year 2000.

It is accepted that the ability to read and write confers on an individual certain level of power: power to communicate more effectively, power to explore the environment wider and more critically and power to better self understanding. Greater creativity, better appreciation of governmental efforts, more ability to take initiative, easier governance and enlightened followership among other positive features are also possible through the power conferred on the individual by the ability to read and write. Essentially therefore, functionally literate individuals do acquire necessary basic communication skills which Berlo (1960), Akpan (1987) and Inyang-Abia (1988) see as being fundamental to modern living. This fact is underscored by the numerous literacy-focused demands made on the individual by the modern society.

Conversely, illiteracy denies the individual of valuable opportunities to fully live. Deficiency in communication skills such as ability to read and write not only limits the individual's ability to fully utilize the information around, but also affects

the psyche and consequently the personality of the individual. Ability to explore the environment for self, community and national development becomes stifled. Illiteracy is therefore a significant dysfunctional factor in national aspiration towards the national goals, especially those related to scientific and technological progress. But how much and in which dimensions are we literate?

## THE PROBLEM

Generally the term "literacy" implies ability to read and write. Reading, according to Heilman (1977), involves meaningful recognition and accurate decoding of prints into sounds or decoding of graphic representative of language into meaning which is consistent with known facts. By implication therefore writing involves ability to meaningfully encode sounds into their graphic symbols or representatives. By logical extension therefore a literate individual is the one who is capable of encoding and decoding meaningfully the linguistic or verbal symbols. That means the fully literate individual should be able to meaningfully and accurately create and interpret verbal signals into and from visual signals whether print, pictorial, gestural or electronic. Such ability should at least reflect the core areas of human activities as dictated by the technological culture of the society and the time.

Given the situation explained above and bearing in mind the extrapolated technological evolutionary trend in Nigeria -

- what dimensions of literacy are proposed for the year 2000?
- of what significance are such dimensions to successful individual and national growth and development?
- What implications have such dimensions of literacy to teacher education and instructional media design and utilization?

## DIMENSIONS OF LITERACY

If science and technology have brought some changes into different aspects of human activities they surely have affected the concepts held about education and training. Perhaps that is why "even the definition of schooling", according to Stephens (1990), is being re-examined. Such re-examination tries to establish



range, cost effectiveness and utility. Consequently therefore, literacy should be redefined beyond the mere ability to read and write print materials or symbols. Nigerians need to be computer literate, visually literate and environmentally literate as well by year 2000.

### PRINT LITERACY

Much has already been said on this. It is however important to add that print literacy is singularly important because it provides the basic foundation for exploring written communication which has been locked up in billions of volumes and millions of films all over the world.

Nigeria, the giant of Africa, is still trailing behind other African and third world countries in terms of print literacy rate. Consider the figures in table 1.

TABLE 1: COUNTRIES AND THEIR PRINT LITERACY RATE

COUNTRY	LITERACY RATE*	
	MALE	FEMALE
1. Nigeria	54%	31%
2. Cameroon	68%	45%
3. Kenya	70%	49%
4. Ghana	64%	43%
5. India	57%	29%
6. U. K.	99%	99%
7. Egypt	59%	30%
8. U.S.A.	99%	99%
9. China	82%	66%
10. Uganda	70%	45%

Source: The Hutchinson Concise Encyclopedia  
\*1985 estimates.

### B. VISUAL LITERACY

Heinich, Molenda and Russell (1982) point out that visual literacy is a new concept of literacy that was designed in response to the realization that "specific skills are needed to "read" and "write" visual messages, just as they are needed to read and write printed ones (p.62)." Visual literacy is therefore that learned ability an individual needs to facilitate acquisition, processing, interpretation, creation and evaluation of visual messages accurately.

The need for visual literacy is underscored by the increasing production, use and storage of visual messages occasioned by the new technologies of printing, reproduction and graphics among others. Books, periodicals, newspapers, bill-boards, handbills, T-shirts, the television, video and posters usually compel attention through visuals. Such wealth of visual communication usually carry with them loads of information which Nigerians need to be able to effectively utilize by critically decoding them. Teachers and designers of communication contents, students and their parents, administrators and subordinates, all need to be visually literate to improve upon their communicative ability. Teachers and students can best derive maximum educational advantage when they optimize their various dimensions of literacy.

### C. COMPUTER LITERACY

Fast changes and innovations in science and technology have gradually invaded the home and the classroom to the advantage of the learners. The computer is gradually becoming a necessary companion both at home, at the operating theatre, in the office, in the laboratories, in automobiles, at school and in the shops. All facets of life have now become vulnerable to the compelling attack of the computer. Yet how many Nigerians speak, write and interpret the computer language? Computer literacy is therefore a must by the year 2000.

Cohen's (1979) study showed that even in advanced countries that have attained near perfection in print literacy rate, computer literacy was still at very low rate. Nigeria must however learn from such errors and emphasize computer literacy at all stages of her instructional programmes.



Related to education, computer literacy can enhance the various technologies of instruction. The novelty, the colour, animation, versatility, memory capacity, high speed, personalized response system, simulation ability, musical capacity, feedback mode among other values of the computer can promote faster learning within shorter time.

#### D. ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

In spite of its closeness and absolute importance the environment has always been taken so much for granted that it is wantonly abused by both the rich and the poor. One reason for such is lack of capability to create and utilize the environment sustainably. Among obvious results of environmental illiteracy are flood, drought, ozone layer depletion, global warming, desert encroachment, diseases, irregular climatic situations among numerous other adverse effects.

Environmental literacy involves the learned ability to create situations that enhance maintaining essential ecological processes and life-support system, preserving genetic diversity, ensuring sustainable utilization of species and the ecosystem and sustainable development. All these lead to environmental preservation and longevity of the earth (IUCN, UNEP and WWF: 1980). Nigerians need very urgently adequate dosage of environmental literacy irrespective of their position and rank. By the year 2000, if adequate amount of such literacy is not widely available to all there is greater risk and hazards to the various development efforts should be expected for without the environment there can be no development.

#### AGENDA FOR LITERACY BY THE YEAR 2000

Having considered the four dimensions of literacy for all by the year 2000 vis-a-vis extrapolations in science and technology the following agenda are proposed.

- a) Visual literacy should be incorporated into all teacher training programmes and into the General Studies (GSS) Courses in all institutions of higher learning.
- b) Early childhood, primary and Junior Secondary education

months to 15 years) should be sponsored by the federal government to ensure that all Nigerian children of school age are in school.

- c) Computer education should be incorporated into all teacher education and all secondary and tertiary education.
- d) There is immediate need to intensify the training of educational technologists, environmental educators, computer analysts, and programmers and computer engineers. This can facilitate the production of materials and learning experiences for literacy programmes.
- e) All adult education courses at all levels of education in Nigeria should be declared tuition-free.
- f) At least two adult education courses should be compulsory for all teacher trainees irrespective of level of education.
- g) Federal government should take over formal education up to Junior secondary three immediately and remove its funding from the concurrent list.
- h) Environmental education should be integrated into the General Studies (GSS) programme and all teacher education programmes. It should be made one of the core courses to facilitate environmental literacy.
- i) There should be greater and more aggressive pursuit of international co-operation in areas of environmental literacy and awareness because environmental problems do not respect political boundaries.
- j) The design and production of instructional materials should be expanded and more vigorously pursued by both the private and public sectors; 2½% of school budget should be devoted to the provision of instructional materials.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Literacy for all by the year 2000 needs to be expanded to include the four dimensions of print literacy, visual literacy, computer literacy and environmental literacy. Expansion of teacher education and general studies programmes at all levels should incorporate the various dimensions of literacy.

The federal government is also called upon to fund education of children 6 months to 15 years and remove that level of education from the concurrent list.



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