LITERACY FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: FOUNDATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Literacy is an essential ingredient of success in present day society, where so much information is conveyed by the written word. A literate population is a key to the efficient functioning of such a society. The ability to read and write offers multiple perspectives that contribute to socio-economic development, developing the capacity for social awareness and critical reflection as a basis for personal and social change. This article acquaints on the premise that what should constitute as bedrock for conscientious, reliable and health – giving polity or system of a people is the foundational development in the area of education. It tries to highlight the importance of reading and the acquisition of basic cognitive skills to create direction and orderliness for a reputable administration. With its conclusion, the paper suggests that public officers and those who hold positions of authority in the land be required to have received training and instruction from reputable educational institutions. As a duty to the populace, government should organize and place directives for educational seminars and workshops from time to time. This professional training must be attended by all public officers as at when required and sanction should be imposed on officers who refuse to comply or participate.

Key Words: Literacy; Information; Foundational Development; Good Governance; Reading.

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Introduction

The imperative issue facing a nation, any nation, developed, underdeveloped or developing as is the case of Nigerian in the 21st Century is the herculean task of educating its teeming populace. According to the Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report: Reaching the Marginalized (2010), Nigeria is estimated to have a population of 150 million of which over 64 million are adult illiterates. Poverty is endemic and as in many other countries it is concentrated in the rural areas and urban slums. A recent national literacy survey (2010) conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics in Nigeria estimates the adult literacy rate at 56.9 percent, with huge variations between states, (Lagos 88.3% and Yobe only 14.4%) regions (Urban 74.6% and rural 48.7%) and sex (male 65.1% and female 48.6%). It is generally recognized that a literacy rate of 70% is essential for a developing country to make a sustainable economic take off.

As a vehicle of both individual empowerment and national development, education bridges the gap between the literate and the not so literate. More so, the National Policy on Education (2013) underlines the provision of functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never attended school or have not completed primary cycle and remedial education for young people who did not complete secondary education as the principal goals of mass literacy and non-formal education.

Literacy

Literacy is fluid concept and since the world is has become a global village; more and more conceptions of literacy evolve. According to Ezeokoli (2002), literacy has been characterized as being country specific, technologically determined as well as being language specific.

Some conceptions of literacy identified by Young (2001) are examined here.

New literacy: the ability to solve genuine problems amidst a deluge of information and its transfer in the digital age.

Digital literacy: the ability to attain deeper understanding of content by using data analysis tools and accelerated learning processes enabled by technology.

Critical literacy: the ability to look at the meaning and purpose of written texts, visual applications, and spoken words to question the attributes, values and beliefs behind them. The goal is development of critical thinking to discern meaning from array of multimedia, visual imagery and virtual environments, as well as written text.

Computer literacy: the ability to accurately and effectively use computer tools such as words processor, spread sheets, databases, and presentation and graphic software.

Computer Technology Literacy: the ability to manipulate the hardware that is the understructure of technology systems.

Information Literacy: the ability to access and use information, analyze content, work with ideas, synthesize thought, and communicate results.

Media Literacy: the ability to communicate in all media forms – print and electronic – as well as access, understand, analyze and evaluate the images, words, and sounds that comprise contemporary culture.

This access is crucial to improve conditions for trust among citizens, media, and state, and to implement and sustain governance agenda. Media literacy is commonly defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content. (Tornero, 2008). The media plays a crucial role in shaping a healthy democracy and ensuring good governance. According to Norris and Odugbemi (2009) the media has three key roles that can have tremendous impact on good governance and accountability if effectively fulfilled. As watchdogs, the news media protect public interests by monitoring society's powerful sectors to uncover corruption and misinformation. As agenda sellers, media raise awareness of social issues and specifically major global crises that call for action; and finally as gate keepers, they write a plurality of perspectives and voices to debate issues of concern (Norris, & Odugbemi, 2009).

Other conceptions of literacy include are basic literacy (which refers to the first step in the process of acquiring literacy- Obanya, 2000) and according to Ezeokoli (2002), permanent literacy (which denotes the acquisition of literacy skill consolidating basic literacy skills and resulting in further or life-long literacy) and functional literacy (which denotes literacy that is work oriented or relevant literacy). Literacy entails all the above including others like numeracy, graphicracy and financial literacy which are in one way or the other makes a complete literate individual in contemporary society. What it means to be a "literate" person in the 21st century is aptly summarized by Lev (2000).

> *Traditionally, we have selected teachers who were already literate and could pass their literacy along to our children. Now, however the very nature of literacy is regularly changing because of new information and communication technologies. Many teachers literate in older technologies quickly become illiterate as newer technologies of information and communication replace previous technologies....we must begin to develop strategies to help each of us keep up with the continually changing definitions of literacy that will exist in our world. (p. 763)*

Benefits of Literacy

The following according to Educational Trust (2010) are the benefits of literacy:

Personal benefits**:** involves fulfillment of human rights, self esteem empowerment, social well being, leadership and critical spirit. All these will help to position the individual for effective participation in the society.

Political benefits**:** ensure increased political participation, embracing of democratic values, good governance, conflict resolution, peace and reconciliation. These will promote in the individual the acquisition of sound political ideals that are required in every progressive society for good governance.

Cultural benefits**:** literacy promotes cultural transformation, innovation, promotion and preservation of cultural diversity. For effective cultural transmission and perpetuation, literacy cannot be dispensed with.

Social benefits: literacy contributes to maintenance of good health, increased family stability, improvements in education, gender equality, social cohesion, inclusion and empowerment.

Economic benefits**:** literacy promotes wealth creation, economic growth, increase individual income, sustainable development etc. (EFA Global Monitoring Report Literacy for Life, 2006).

Literacy is crucial to the acquisition, by every child, youth and adult, of essential life skills that enable them to address the challenges they face in life, and represents an essential step in basic education, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century (United Nations, 2006).

There are new forms of literacies and media literacy should not be confused with information literacy. Carlsson cited in Martinsson (2009) explains that while information literacy focuses on technical skills to develop and distribute media, media literacy centers on citizen and cultural expression. Both literacies connect to issues of democracy and active citizenship and, therefore, should be merged to promote the role of citizenship and active participation more effectively.

In their 'watchdog' role, the media can play an important role to promote transparency, accountability, and public scrutiny of decision-makers, by highlighting policy failures, maladministration by public officials, corruption in the judiciary, and scandals in the corporate sector (George, Donohue, and Tichenor, 2005). Investigative journalism can open the government's secret records to external scrutiny and critical evaluation, and hold authorities answerable for their actions. The media also exposes maneuverings and abuses of fundamental human rights. It is also castigate elections rigging and other

objective assessments of the process and results of elections and offer recommendations for improvement. The media also has a critical role to mediate between the state and citizens through the debates and discussions about the major issues of the day and informing people about the stand of their leaders on such issues. If the channels of communication reflect the cultural and social pluralism and diversity of the society, in a fair and balanced manner, then only various opinion and different voices can be heard in public debates for good governance.

Governance

The University of Oxford (2006) defines governance as the act or method of governing, of exercising control or authority over the actions of subjects, a system of regulation. According to the institution, governance refers to the process of decision-making within an institution. Governments, the military, civil society, organizations, media, political parties and NGOS are all actors in the process of governance. Suffice to say therefore, good governance would be one in which institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe. Good governance comes from quality learning and interactions during academic travail and beyond. It is the totality of how people organize and manage their life activities irrespective of pluralistic life patterns of the populace. Dr. Obiageli Ezekwesili, former Minister of Education once emphasized sound policies and strong institutions, transparency accountability responsibility and participation as paths to good governance. The former World Bank Chief posits that "this attributes is not only for leaders, the citizens also need it because they must obey the law of the land". Good governance would enable government enact policies that would help to develop the nation, rejuvenate the national economy, tackle corruption and ensure national growth. Further characteristics of good governance would be effective and efficient, consensus oriented, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in

decision making. It is also responsible to the present and future needs of society.

Among the many strategies government nay a good government should be looking at for development would be the re-introduction of the reading culture of the people. Reading is the ability to look at and understand the meaning of written or printed words or symbols. Citing Goodman (1971) Egbe (1999) sees reading as a psycholinguistic process by which a reader or a language user reconstructs to the best of his ability what has been graphically encoded to him. In the opinion of Makinde (2004*),*

> *reading transcends the mere seeing of words*
> *clearly, or just pronouncing printed words*
> *correctly and it is even more than recognizing*
> *the meaning of words in isolation(p.83)*

It could be inferred from the views above that a strong relationship exists between reading and language, and that it is equally a purposeful and functional behavior that every literate individual must possess and exhibit as long as they live on earth.

There are books, too numerous to be read. Literary books (literature-plays, poems, drama, textbooks, and technical reports) are to be studied from cover to cover. Certain level of literacy is needed to be able to utilize and interpret encyclopedias, dictionaries, catalogue, directories, time table, and such materials effectively. Newspapers, pictures, news reports, journals, weather forecast, sign language, shorthand, Braille, chemical formula algebra, formal expression or logic, labels and menus recipes, street signs, posters computer program; marks and diagrams, x-rays, innovative, e-books are produced to catch the attention of all: young and old.

Some of us are known to be able to read palms, faces, the sky, sea, weather, situation in between the line. When we read, we decode written words into sounds. But the better part yet is paying close attention to information that is relevant to the readers' purposes. Here, the kernel of the written materials is

correctly deciphered and appropriate communication is ensured. The reader is able to achieve this based on the visual information applied from his head rather than information from the printed material. According to Abubakar 2014, it is important that we read, and read what adds value to our lives for any man who does not read is as bad as a man who cannot read. A lot depends on the government. Parents have their duty too, but the responsibility is on the government to make provision and equip schools to be more conducive for children to learn and keep the price of learning materials affordable and available, even imported printed books, if Nigeria as a country is to reaffirm its commitment to Education For All (EFA) and other universal goals by 2015.

The necessity for literacy for both adults and young people alike, therefore, makes it imperative for a renewed education consciousness and adoption of a workable strategy for its implementation. For the people of a nation to contribute effectively, and be carried along and participate in the affairs of the polity as law abiding citizens, they must be knowledgeable. No nation can arise above the quality of its citizens (NPE, 2013). The type of scholarly refinement given to the people of a nation determines the type of government that might exist in that country. If poor quality development is given to the citizens, there is the likelihood that the products will have little or nothing to offer the nation. As a social-contract between the people and its government, education, being the best legacy, is the only 'weapon that can fight ignorance, poverty and religious extremism'. (The Guardian Education, Thursday, September 25, 2014.)

The effective and timely provision of quality literacy to the nation therefore, will greatly improve the lives and livelihoods of its population. For when a learner has not give what one doe not have. As individuals learn, they become literate. learnt, how will he perform creditably if he happens to be a governor, or president or even the local government chairperson?

One cannot Democracy cannot, work when there is mass illiteracy in the land. People can't make informed judgement or be able to demand accountability from their government.

Characteristics of Good Governance

Norris and Odugbemi (2006) identified the following characteristics of good governance:

Participation: either direct or through legitimate intermediate institution or representatives. It needs to be informed and organized. This means freedom of association and expression and an organized civil society.

Transparency: decisions taken and their enforcement are done in manner that follows rules and regulations. Enough information is provided in easily understandable forms and media. Transparency means that information is freely available and accessible to the people.

Responsiveness: good governance requires that institutions and processes to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe.

Accountability: all aims of government and the governed must be accountable. Accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and the role of law.

Consensus oriented: there must be mediation of all interests to reach broad consensus. This would require an understanding of the historical, cultural and social context of a given society or community.

Equity and inclusiveness: this requires all groups, particularly the most vulnerable. All members need to feel that they have al stake in the society's well being and not feel excluded from the mainstream.

Effectiveness and Efficiency: good governance means that processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. The concept of efficiency in this context also covers the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of the

environment. Good governance helps to create a secure and efficiently managed nation.

Democracy requires that people should have the right to know all the activities of the government, particularly the decisions of the government that affects their life, liberty and property.

Information is very vital for people to make decisions regarding their involvement of the state and the civil society. Adequate information helps the citizens to decide sensibly and take the right course of action favourable to them. Media thus helps people to know what is happening around the world and socialize them with the values of pluralism. By publicizing information the media also make public services more responsive to the people (Yadav Lal Babu, 2001). Media has been playing a crucial role in protection of rights by making people aware of their rights.

The media is also ensuring that people be vigilant on political developments in the world and help to stimulate debate drawing attention to all social evils including the institutional failures, corruption, inefficiency and illegal activities.

Foundational Development

Literature reveals that many adults are not educated. This robs on leaders to some too. Some are not well baked academically for the position they occupy for the right foundational development for good governance. Visionary leaders should lead the way and provide for all round development of the citizens of the country.

To have such leaders, the masses must be provided for in the area of schools and their accompaniments from primary to the tertiary levels. Literacy is to be promoted right from the grassroots by compelling all to avail themselves of the provided schools. Indeed, it is the literate individual that can cope effectively in a global world that is characterized by sophisticated information technology.

Governments at all levels are duty bound to provide schools with conducive and inviting environment to pupils, students and prospective ones. The schools must be learner friendly.

Well balanced curricula that take care of the all round development of learners including that of leadership skills must be developed or designed for use in all educational institutions. In addition, well trained teachers must be recruited in quality and quantity as well as providing quality literacy materials in print and digital formats for the present information society.

Conclusion

The clarion call for the improvement in the education sector cannot be over emphasized. A literate nation is one that can positively compete globally. A literate populace can effectively participate in the general rule of law of the polity. Literate societies enable the free exchange of text-based information and provide an array of opportunities for life long learning. Media literacy can strengthen the public interest to improve socio-political conditions, enable citizens to participate actively in public discussions and deliberations to affect change and empower citizens to fulfill their rights and obligations. Media literacy deserves priority and acceptance as a critical component for a healthy democratic public sphere. Hence, creating a strong mandate through a multi-stakeholder approach is necessary to affect policy change and to extend research programs, demonstrating clearly the linkages among media literacy, citizen action, and good governance. This is to say, that, on the expiration of office given, the public officer should be said to have left behind a legacy of honour, service and integrity. An indelible positive impact in the heart of the governed. Such vision should be transferred to successive administrations.

Recommendations

Delivering on the promise of quality literacy for all Nigerians will under pin on-going national development efforts, particularly in the areas of economic growth and poverty reduction. The effective and timely provisions of quality

literacy to nearly 50 million Nigerians will greatly improve the lives and livelihoods of nearly half the population. Government must arise and live of to its social responsibility to the populace by acknowledging and making provision for the following in order to enhance and ensure good governance in Nigeria.

1. The government must provide leadership by massively boosting its budgetary allocations to education.

2. Government should start by re-introducing adult education and implementing it with vigour. Poverty of ideas breeds poverty in leadership and, of course, a further impoverishment of the rest of the populace.

3. Programmes that will revitalize adult and youths alike should be enacted and the necessary machine be set in place for smooth take off.

4. The federal government should work in collaboration with the states and local government councils while non governmental organizations (NGOS), private educational concerns should be actively cultivated to take the lead. A proactive policy framework should be worked by all the stakeholders to provide the plank for a vibrant adult literacy programme which can save Nigeria from becoming an illiterate giant. (The Guardian, Editorial, Thursday, October 16, 2014).

5. Support Research on Linkages among media literacy, citizen action, and Good governance.

6. Government should as a mark of integrity imposes sanctions on public officers who fail to comply or participate in organized programmes, seminars or workshops for national educational improvement.

7. There should be regular check-ups of programme reviews, reporting and evaluation by government established monitoring team.

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