

# **ILLITERACY IN A CENTURY-OLD EDUCATION SYSTEM: THE CHALLENGE OF ADULT EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

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To help human beings to emerge from the darkness of ignorance is an inspiring task indeed. To stamp out illiteracy in our age is a moral duty. It is one of the foundations of true peace that is a peace based on the freedom and dignity of man. (Rene' Maheu Statement on Literacy Day, 1967).

## **Introduction**

The title of this lecture may suggest to some people, a history of a hundred years of Nigerian Education; to some others, it may suggest an appraisal of the education enterprise since the advent of formal western education. That is not, however, the focus of the lecture. What I have rather tried to do is to draw the attention of today's Nigerians to the persistent and the alarming prevalence of illiteracy and its attendant negative consequences in spite of the more than a century of efforts by governments, organizations and individuals. I want also to share with you what I think are responsible for the prevalence of illiteracy in Nigeria, what I have done so far to advance the cause of literacy , and what I think need to be done to eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria.

Illiteracy has been identified as one of the major handicaps responsible for the setbacks in the realization of well-conceived development projects in Nigeria. Other identified handicaps are inadequate policy framework, lip-service and inadequate commitment of government in adopting adult education vigorously as a major strategic objective and as an instrument for national development. Understanding the important role of adult education in all the facets of human development is essential for the eradication of illiteracy. I have in my academic career of over twenty eight years devoted myself to the advancement of the cause of adult education. This lecture, among other things, therefore, highlights my researches, teaching, and field experiences so far, that is to say, what I have done and what I think must be done to eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria.

## **The Concept of Illiteracy:**

According to the United Nations' Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 1989), definition, the illiterate, also known as the non-reader is :

a person who cannot, with understanding, read and write a simple statement on his everyday life; and a functionally illiterate is a person who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to

continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development.

The illiterate is, therefore, a person for whom the written word or symbol in any language conveys no meaning and who, consequently, cannot use it in any form of communication.

These ordinary definitions of illiteracy must today be extended to include what I may call the neo-illiterates. Today one talks about "computer literacy". Thus science and technology have created a new class of illiterates to which some traditionally literate people now belong. Anyone who today does not possess the requisite skills in computer and internet usage is a "neo-illiterate. Unfortunately, even in our institutions of higher learning, there are many "neo-illiterates".

Many studies on illiteracy have shown that people who cannot read and write usually have very negative self-perception of themselves. Some scholars have tried to get inside the mind of the non-reader in order to discover how and what he/she thinks. Eberle and Robinson (1980:5,8,36) recorded the following utterances of some illiterates in Vermont, U.S.A.

My biggest hurt of all is I feel I have failed my children because I couldn't help them with their school work.

If someone handed me a piece of paper to read, I pretended to read it. If anyone asked questions I said everything was alright and that I didn't have any questions.

I want to write a letter ..... , you got to get someone to do it for you. Everybody knows my business.

x

When you don't read, it is like riding a motorcycle with your eyes closed, You don't know what is coming up next.

The hardest thing about it is I've been places where I don't know where I was, if you don't know where you are, and you can't read something, you are lost. It sure ain't fun to be lost.

How do you go about telling someone you want to marry that you can't read?

Right? Man it is like opening a bottle, putting a stick of dynamite in it, and hoping it doesn't go off.

In 1998, I carried out a research study among fifty-seven University of Nigeria illiterate casual farm hands. They were asked the following questions:

- i) How do you feel about your inability to read and write in your mother tongue or in English?
- ii) What would you want to be done to help you learn to read and write?

The following were the most frequently given responses:

I feel useless and cannot make meaningful contributions especially in the midst of the educated; whatever they say is right, carries.

I always look for somebody to read my letters or write for me. Sometimes my letter remained for days before I got someone to read it for me. Sometimes I feel they have not told me everything in the letter.

I look stupid and ashamed each time I receive my monthly pay and have to thumb-print against my name instead of signing my name. More painful is when I thumb-print and cannot recognize my own thumb-print after many others have done theirs. I want to be able to write and sign my name on paper at least.

I wish I could be born again. If I were to be born again, nothing would prevent me from reading and writing. I feel cheated.

Sometimes those who read newspapers refuse to tell you the whole story about important events. I wish I could read simple books or even newspapers.

My son bought me a watch. We have a clock in the house but I cannot tell the time. I wake up too early and go to work hours before others. I want to know how to tell the time.

It should be noted here that each of the respondents whether in the USA or in Nigeria expressed self disappointment, humiliation and a sense of failure arising from the embarrassments experienced as an illiterate.

### **The Concept of Literacy**

What then is Literacy? There are various definitions of literacy; but for the purpose of this lecture, we shall - consider two of them: the definition of literacy adopted

during the June 2003 meeting organized by the Basic . Education Sector of the UNESCO in collaboration with

U.I.S and that proposed in the Persepolis meeting of 1975.

The definition proposed by the UNESCO follows the traditional concept of functional literacy:

Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contents. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling the individual to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potentials, and participate fully in the community and wider society.

To this may be added a further dimension of literacy earlier defined also by the UNESCO in 1965. This is known as functional literacy or work oriented literacy. It is considered to be comprehensive enough to teach economic skills and offer immediate use to the recipients in participating in important political issues and personal matters. This dimension of literacy calls for definite programmes and instructional objectives and strategies within a context of development which should be part of an over-all educational plan in order that the new literates may become active members of the society.

The other concept of literacy called the Persepolis Declaration of 1975, is based on a new ideology and methodology. It considers literacy to be not just the process of learning the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic but a contribution to the liberation of man and to his full development. Thus conceived, literacy creates conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of the society in which one lives. It also stimulates man's initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it, and of defining the aims of an authentic human development. The ideology highlighted by this concept is that of literacy for liberation and the methodology that of dialogue based on significant themes relevant to the learner's everyday life.

Literacy is a valid and an effective tool for empowerment. Here is an example of a woman empowered by literacy education. In 2004 a group of rural women registered in an adult literacy programme organized by my NGO, called Literacy Initiative Network Connections Services (LINCS). Describing how literacy has improved her life, after two years in the programme, one of the women said: "I can now tell the time, I do not have to wait for the sound of the plane before I can say it is time to prepare food for my children coming back from school; and I can now write; I do not have to mark on the wall to remember the amount of money given to me by my age grade meeting to keep as treasurer. All that makes me feel happy and proud.

A similar report was given by Aksornkool (1995) about Chu Yung Song, a Japanese, and one of the lucky 563 million adult illiterate women in the world today who now have access to literacy education by the UNESCO and can read and write. Describing how literacy has changed her life, Chu said:

I don't have to mark bus tyres any more to make sure I get the right bus, and I don't panic when I leave my child in hospital because I know I will be able to find her ward and my way out again. And when I use the public toilets, there are no more embarrassing surprises.

It is in such simple testimonies that one can appreciate the impact of the acquisition of literacy on people's everyday life.

## **Dealing with Illiteracy in Nigeria: Some Major Steps and Policies of Government from Colonial to Post Independence Era**

The magnitude of the problem of illiteracy in Nigeria was early recognized by colonial Britain as needing attention. In 1941 for instance, the colonial government set up an Advisory Committee charged with the responsibility to consider the best approach to the problem of mass illiteracy and adult education for Nigeria. The Committee found out that educational efforts were mainly for the teaching of young ones and warned about the danger of partial development which could be the result of such a trend. The advice of the Committee that the government should pay equal attention to the education of both the young and the adults, for better life in the community, was forwarded to the House of Commons in July, 1943. Commenting on the issues, the then Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. Arthur Creech Jones, observed:

In many colonies we see, first a mass of illiteracy among adults and, secondly, an all too small percentage of present-day school population giving, therefore, little hope on present line of reducing that mass of adult illiteracy. I believe that if we are to get full advantage from various reforms which we proposed in the colonial empire the position has to be altered radically and it has to be altered urgently.

That comment in which Nigeria was included was made after more than half a century of effective British colonization of Nigeria.

It was recognized then that any effort to deal with mass illiteracy would require the co-operation of all the stakeholders especially the local population and the government. To enable people acquire basic literacy, the British government provided adult education in various communities by opening up evening classes. Voluntary Agencies and local authorities also showed interest in the provision of adult literacy in various parts of the country.

In the then Northern Provinces, the need was particularly felt to provide adult education for the illiterate masses. In 1946 the Regional Ministry of Education set up an adult education department. A certain Major A J Carpenter, an Education Officer with vast experiences acquired during his services in the army, with the assistance of the UNESCO expert, devised methods to facilitate the teaching of adults in the Northern Provinces. He also started a lot of projects there; such as the production of film strips and other visual aids. The North Literacy Agency (NORLA) was also established. These measures contributed to the spread of literacy education in the North.

By 1949, a full time education officer was appointed for the Northern Provinces, charged with the responsibility to give adult education his undivided attention. In 1953, a major decision was taken to teach adult literacy in vernacular languages throughout the Northern Provinces. That was facilitated by a certain Dr Wolffe, a linguistic expert from the UNESCO who was enlisted for the preparation of primers in the approved orthographies for the languages concerned. These efforts contributed to the publication of a newspaper in Hausa, the *Gaskiya Ta Kwabo*, a Hausa language newspaper, in the effort to provide literacy in the language.

Similarly in the Western Provinces, after the second world war, every local government authority was encouraged to start adult education. According to the 1952 memorandum on

extension of adult education in the Western Region, the main purpose was to provide remedial basic education for adults. That was made possible with the production of vernacular literature to help the neo-literate adults to read and write in their own language and to participate more intelligently in social and political matters. The *Irohin*, a Yoruba language Newspaper was published then to help in the spread of mass literacy in Yoruba.

The organization of adult education centres was done by the village Adult Education Committee under a local government council. Financing adult education was a joint responsibility of the Regional Government, the Native Administration and the villages. The involvement of local government bodies in the development of adult education in the then Western Provinces was outstanding. That was climaxed by the November, 1960 Refresher course in Ibadan which attracted adult educators and the employees of local government authorities to examine the quality-of the society and what can be done to raise it. The course aimed at achieving better living conditions for the community and emphasized the ability to read and write as an important part of social development.

In the Eastern Provinces also after the second world war, Adult Education and Community Development was understood to be the vehicle for social, economic and political development and progress. However it is significant to note that the local people in the Eastern Provinces generally refused to be taught in their vernacular. Furthermore, it was discovered that persons who were competent to organize and teach adult literacy class were often non-indigenes of the areas and, therefore, considered incompetent to teach the people in an unfamiliar vernacular language. English language was, therefore, adopted to accommodate the interest and wishes of the people for whom the literacy education was designed. Another reason for adopting the English language in the teaching of literacy in the Eastern Provinces was the negative conception which the people had, that mass literacy in vernacular was meant for a despised set of individuals. The other reason for adopting the English language was to enable the average native authority councillors to improve their English and simple accounting. However, the major reason for adopting the English language was that the natives did not see any good reason in being taught to read and write in their own native vernacular.

Nevertheless, Udi people in the Eastern Provinces, were an exception to the demand for literacy in English. Vernacular literacy experiment started in Udi Division with Mr. E.R. Chadwick, a district officer who provided the guiding spirit with his staff. The Udi experiment was to find out whether the people could succeed in a mass literacy campaign with little and poor quality local talent to help them. That experiment was considered successful because by the mid-fifties, many projects in Adult Education and Community Development were launched.

The desire for literacy education in the Igbo language grew rapidly and more classes were organized by religious bodies, voluntary agencies and native authorities.

While newspapers in vernacular were published in other provinces to help in the campaign for mass literacy, in the East, only columns were mapped out in local newspapers for local news in the vernacular for those interested in reading the vernacular. This particular attitude of the Igbos to their language was also fully manifested in 1990 when the States were mandated to establish Agencies for Adult and Non-formal Education. The Eastern States were the last to do so. They resisted it saying that adult education was not needed because everybody in the States was educated. I was then the Head of the Department of Adult Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) and I recall that the then Commissioner for Education, old Imo State (now Abia, Ebonyi and the present Imo State) Professor Iheanacho Egonu, my husband, and the then Commissioner for Education old Anambra State (now Enugu and present Anambra State), Chief Nduka Eya, had an uphill task and faced serious opposition in their efforts to convince their respective Executive Councils to approve the establishment of Agencies for Adult and Non-formal Education in those Igbo-speaking states. Today, we know that literacy in Igbo is significantly lower than that in other major Nigerian languages, in spite of the establishment of departments of Igbo Studies in many higher institutions of learning in the Igbo culture areas of Nigeria.

Between 1960 when Nigeria became independent and 1990 when the National Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-formal Education was established, several national development plans and strategies were launched and embarked upon without providing any comprehensive strategy for the development of adult education. However, in 1977 the National Policy on Education was adopted and modified in 1981 to provide for equal access to education, continuing education, lifelong learning and the eradication of illiteracy.

This move notwithstanding, it has been observed that not much has been achieved in the eradication of illiteracy. According to Nnazor (2005) there has hardly been a sustainable virile and coherently comprehensive set of programmes demonstrating government's commitment to adult education as a strategic priority in Nigeria's development. Nnazor also observed that although the National Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-formal Education was to monitor and coordinate adult education programmes and conduct related research towards the development of adult and non-formal education in Nigeria, adult education programmes continue to operate mainly as disparate piecemeal activities that are not integrated into a coherent, purposeful strategy in the pursuit of a national development vision. Besides, he noted that many of the government sponsored adult education activities have been systematically starved of funds.

A close look at the 2007 annual report of the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education confirms these observations. According to one of the Directors of the Commission, that report is said to be the first of its kind since the Commission was established 19 years ago. The challenges and constraints facing the programme, as listed in that report, do not indicate much progress or hope for adult education in Nigeria. Some of the major challenges and constraints include:

- Inadequate policy framework, enabling environment and resources to run mass literacy programmes.
- Lack of political will and commitment that are indispensable for the successful promotion and prosecution of adult education.
- Inadequate infrastructure and inappropriate learning centres.
- Ill-qualified and insufficient facilitators and personnel to manage the centres.
- Inadequate publicity of the importance of mass literacy education.
- Lack of incentives and inconsistent payment of stipends to facilitators.

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Today, 68 years after the colonial intervention in adult literacy in Nigeria, illiteracy still remains a major problem. The UNESCO 2005 report indicates that Nigeria has a total high adult illiteracy rate of 70.7 per cent. This represents 77.8 per cent for men and 63.8 per cent for women.

### **Adult Education as an Academic Discipline: The University of Nigeria Experience**

The Founding Fathers of Nigeria's first autonomous University fully appreciated the need for continuing education and the updating of knowledge and skills. Consequently the Continuing Education Centre (CEC) was one of the foundation units of the University of Nigeria. That Centre was established in the spirit of the Sir Eric Ashby Report (1960) on Post-School Certificate and Higher Education in Nigeria which recommended strongly the establishment of three more Universities in addition to the University of Ibadan and that every University in Nigeria should have a unit which would take the responsibility of providing opportunities for continuing education for workers and all adults both within and outside the University campuses.

The University of Nigeria started its Division of Extra-Mural Studies in 1962. It took over in the Eastern Region, the Extra-Mural activities which the University of Ibadan had provided since 1949. The objectives of the Extra-Mural Division are, among other things, to meet the needs of adult learners and promote literacy among those who have missed the opportunity of formal education in the classroom setting. It is also to engage in research on



the problems of adult learning and to provide training programmes for the teachers of adults.

Before the Nigerian civil war (1967), there were six Administrative zones and Headquarters of the Extra-Mural Division at Enugu, Aba, Onitsha, Umuahia, Uyo and Port-Harcourt to carry out the objectives of the Extra-Mural Studies in the then Eastern Region. A field lecturer, who was a university staff and representative, was in charge of each of these Headquarters and zones. The Headquarters and zones were under the Director of the Extra-Mural Studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

At the end of the Nigerian civil war in January 1970, the Continuing Education Centre (CEC) was reactivated for the commencement of Extra-Mural activities in the Eastern States of Nigeria. In 1972, five zonal offices were created; at Enugu campus, Ogui Enugu, Ogoja, Uyo and Onitsha, with the general Headquarter at Nsukka campus. In 1977, more zonal offices were created at Ibagwa Nkwo, Abakaliki, Okigwe, Abiriba, and Owerri to meet the continuing education needs of the areas, through seminars, workshops, symposia, public enlightenment lectures, tutorials etc. In September 1979, following the problems which erupted in the Extra-Mural Studies between the then Director at the Nsukka general Headquarters and the staff in all the zonal offices, the zonal offices were closed down and the staff redeployed in various departments within the University. In the same year, the Extra-Mural Studies Unit was upgraded to an academic department of the University as the Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies to offer degree programmes on Adult Education and continue the services of the Extra-Mural Studies. The following year I joined the new department as the foundation staff in Education Administration.

In March 1971, a national conference on Adult Education was organized at the University of Lagos with the theme, "Adult Education: Key to National Unity and Development". It was at that conference that the Nigeria National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) was formally inaugurated. The history of the Council could, however, be traced back to March 1955 when a conference of Extra-Mural tutors, organizers, and students met at the University College, Ibadan, (Now University of Ibadan) to consider the future development of the Extra-Mural Department of the University College. The Council served as a forum of interaction for Adult Education and Community Development practitioners, professionals in the government, the Universities and private agencies.

The Council subsequently held several annual conference and discussed various themes. The 1972 conference at Bayero University, Kano discussed the theme "Adult Education in Nigeria: The next Ten years". The University of Nigeria Nsukka, conference of July 1973 considered "The Role of Adult Education in the Third National Development Plan". During these conferences, discussions centered on planning, structure, training, finance and implementation of Adult Education programmes. The 1973 conference adopted a resolution to set up a task force to prepare comprehensive proposals for a national adult education programme for inclusion in Nigeria's Third National Development Plan. Consequently the following objectives of Adult Education were stated in the National Policy on Education, 1977:

to provide functional literacy education for adults who have never had an advantage of any formal education.

to provide functional and remedial education for those young people who prematurely drop out of formal school system.

to provide further education for different categories of completers of formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills.

to give the adult citizens of the country aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

With these guidelines, more Universities especially the Federal Universities started academic departments in Adult Education, in addition to running Extra-Mural Units.

In 1989 it was discovered that Adult Education as an academic discipline was not listed by the National Universities Commission (NUC) for accreditation for the following year. The then Vice-Chancellor, Professor Chimere Ikoku of blessed memory, directed the then Director Academic Planning, Professor A. Ali, the Dean Faculty of Education, Professor Olaitan, the University of Nigeria Representative in NUC Professor Loveday Nwosu, and Dr (Mrs) D.U. Egonu, myself, as the Head of the Department of Adult Education, University of Nigeria, to see to it that our department of Adult Education was listed for the NUC accreditation visit of 1990. The NUC then discovered that Adult Education, as an academic programme, had no approved minimum academic standard for accreditation. Following that intervention by the University of Nigeria team the NUC constituted a special committee of 3, made up of Professors Akinpelu and Omole of the University of Ibadan and Dr (Mrs) D U Egonu of the University of Nigeria, to prepare the minimum academic standard for the accreditation of Adult Education Programmes in Nigerian Universities.

On the completion of the committee's work, the then Director, Academic Planning Unit of the Federal Ministry of Education, Dr Steve Akangbu expressed great appreciation and said to me, "This is a job well done. Your name will be recorded in NUC for posterity". Consequently and consistently, I came to be involved in the accreditation of Adult Education programmes in many Nigerian Universities offering a degree in Adult Education.

### **My Work as an Academic**

In over 28 years of University teaching and research, I have published books, journal articles as well as produced learning kits for practically dealing with the problems of illiteracy in the three major areas of Basic Literacy (Reading and Writing); Basic Numeracy (Calculation); and Functional Literacy (Acquiring Skills). I shall briefly discuss some of the work done in these areas to provide literacy and help eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria.

My book, *Approaches to Adult Literacy Programmes*, deals with various literacy models

which can be adopted in teaching adult basic literacy classes. One of the approaches is the well known Paulo Freire's Conscientization Literacy Model. This unique approach to the delivery of literacy programme was privileged in my book because the situation in Brazil where Paulo Freire and his group developed and used it, is similar to what obtains in Nigeria even today where ignorance and poverty, unhealthy environmental conditions, election and examination malpractices, bribery and corruption, cultism and so many other forms of indiscipline are rampant and appear to be tolerated

What we, my students and I, did in the communities around Nsukka, Edeobala, Opi, Isieniu, Obukpa etc was to visit homes and enter into dialogue with the illiterates about real life situations, examine familiar activities of the people, such as farming, food preparation etc, and the significant common words used by them in those activities and in ordinary conversation. These offered us the key words and materials with which we prepared learning kits to introduce the illiterates to reading.

"Generative words" instead of books or primers were used. Through this method, the words picked from discussions with the illiterates about familiar issues or situations were broken down into syllables and through re-combination, new words were formed. Consequently, the illiterates then learnt to read with ease, words that are familiar and meaningful to them. It was possible to select some list of words that would contain all the phonemes in a familiar language to enable the reader sound out orally or record in his/her mind any words he/she knew already. The ideas represented by the words were critically discussed before the words themselves were analyzed as graphic symbols. Thereafter pictures were prepared to illustrate what each word represented. For example, for the word "Gbolodi" (waterleaf), a picture of a farmer planting "gbolodi" would be prepared.

### **Planting of Gbolodi**



A second picture of gbolodi would be shown without the word "gbolodi"

**Picture of "gbolodi" alone**



The third picture showing a farm scene together with the word "gbolodi" would be introduced only after discussion about farming and farming season, the importance of vegetables, problems about planting and other such topics on farming.

## Harvesting of "Gbolodi"



In the same way pictures would be prepared for each of the words gathered in order to ensure full discussion of the significance of the words before any linguistic or graphic representation would be made.

The list was arranged in such a way that the first word had three syllables. This was so made because it was discovered that a chart could be made of the syllables of disyllabic words in a way that helped the non-literates learn the structure of the words of their language. For example, after introducing the word *gbolodi*, it was broken into syllables and the individual syllables read aloud to the group. Then the first syllable *gbo* was presented like this:

*gba, gbe, gbi, gbo, gbu.* The group should recognize, after repeating the five syllables aloud, that the *gb* sound is constant, and also note the sound of the five vowels *a e i o u*. The next syllable, *lo*, is introduced in the same manner. So are the other syllables, *la, le, li, lo, lu*, followed by *da, de, di do, du*. Finally, the three presentations are combined in a chart thus:

<i>gba</i>	<i>gbe</i>	<i>gbi</i>	<i>gbo</i>	<i>gbu</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>lo</i>	<i>lu</i>	<i>da</i>
<i>de</i>	<i>di</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>du</i>							

The teacher reads the chart horizontally and then vertically. He then asks the group to put together other words by combining the syllables on the list in different ways. Sometimes syllables could be combined to form words which would not make sense. This does not matter as long as the mechanism of combining syllables is discovered by the non-literates. The students are trained to accept any combination of syllables and to let the group discuss which words are real or *thinking words* and discard the others, i.e., the "dead words".

This process helps in getting the learners participate in

preparing reading materials used to teach them. The words are familiar and make sense to the learners since the learners themselves have provided them. Primers or simple reading materials on issues such as elections, examination malpractices, environmental conditions, emphasizing "dos", and "dons" not only help them in reading and writing but also help their awareness and critical consciousness. That is what my books, *Okoro and His Family* and *Learning From the Newspaper* **sought to** achieve, and that is how they were conceptualized.»?ts^

The book, *Learning From the Newspaper*, is a resource book for teachers of post literacy classes. Introducing reading through the use of the newspaper in primary schools and adult literacy classes can be both fascinating and rewarding. A good newspaper offers a variety of reading materials which can be very effectively used in i classroom situations. It provides information, opinions, \entertainment and can, therefore, serve to bridge the gap » between the classroom and the outside world. It enables I the learners to develop independent critical thinking, strengthens and increases the skills acquired in certain \*. subject areas especially the language art. In basic adult literacy classes, teachers and learners, through the cutting and pasting of pictures and news items from the newspapers, not only derive immense intellectual stimulus, they can also sharpen their aesthetic sensitivities as well as develop useful skills. Newspapers are highly motivating to adult learners and, unlike conventional text books, they keep adult learners abreast of daily issues of significance and help provide fields of relaxation and enjoyment.

What I did here is to help the adult learners, the teachers and the instructors to be able to exploit the newspaper in their lessons, especially in those situations where books and reading materials are not easy to come by. I suggested teaching ideas on how to use the newspapers to teach the non-reader; I also suggested different activities on helping and motivating the non-readers to read and write.

## **Some Teaching and Learning Ideas on Sections of the Newspaper**

Some teaching and learning activities on various sections of the newspaper are suggested here. The purpose is to enable the neo-literates as individuals or in groups to exploit the newspaper to help in their acquisition of literacy, especially in situations where appropriate reading materials are not easily available. For each section of the newspaper, the instructor is encouraged to suggest other activities to further stimulate and strengthen the interest of the neo-literates in their reading and their writing skills.

### *News Stories:*

1. Make a news story about an incident that took place in your community. Draw some pictures to illustrate your story. Paste them in your note book.

2. Find a news story about a community. Read the story well and write about what you have learnt about the community from the story. Write other things you know about the community.
3. Select all good news stories from a newspaper. Make a good news chart. Put this on your class notice-board.
4. Cut out a sensational news story from your local newspaper. Display this on your notice-board try to answer the 5 Ws of that story: Who, What, When, Where and Why? Underline them.
5. Try to remember a story you have read before. Think about what happened. Imagine yourself as a reporter and write the story as you would have it making sure that the 5WS are answered.
6. Cut out a news story of your choice and paste it in your notebook. Put the same news story in your own words.
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7. Select a news photo and cut it out. Make a list of all the things you could see, hear, smell, taste or touch if you were there.
8. Choose a news photo. Write about what happened and what you think could happen next.
9. Go through news stories and make a list of news stories about Sad, happy, and angry people. Put them under the headings: sad, happy and angry and make comic of them.
10. Imagine that you are a news reporter. Invent an exciting news story and ask your friends to report about this in your news room.. Practice and tape record the reports.
11. Go through the newspaper and choose an interesting news photo. Think about the story the picture is trying to tell us and write it out.
12. Cut out the pictures and names of people who are in the news today. Paste them on a blank sheet and say why you think they should or should not have been in the news.
13. Read through a news story and circle all the words you do not understand. Count how many they are and ask your teacher or your friends to tell you the meaning of those words.
14. Count the number of places mentioned in the news. How many of them can you find in the map? How many have you visited? Circle them.

15. Imagine what you think the world would be like in 30 years time and make up a front page headline news for a newspaper of the future.

### *Want Advertisement*

16. Make one Lost And Found ad. State what was lost, who found it. Write a story and draw a picture of the lost article. Paste it on the notice-board.  
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17. Imagine that you are the owner of a lot and found article/s. Write to your reporter explaining how it happened. Draw the picture/s of the lost article/s.
18. Find where your favourite pet is advertised for sale. Draw the pictures of the pets and write their pet names beside them.
19. Write an advert on the pet you would like to buy and advise your local newspaper to advertise for you. Describe the pet.
20. Do you have a pet? How would you like a want ad written about it? Write the advertisement.
21. Your dog has got six puppies and you want to sell all of them. Write the advertisement for them.
22. Write an advertisement to sell your father's old car that cannot function any more. Make your advertisement funny and interesting.
23. You have a chopper bicycle you would like to sell. Look at the want advertisement and get some ideas. Make up an advertisement to sell your chopper.
24. Look at the column on article for sale see how they are written. Think of the thing you would like to sell and write advertisement for it.
25. Look at the column on Articles For Sale. Pick one ad and guess what might have happened to make people sale it. Write the story about it.
26. Cut out cartoons, paste them on a large sheet of paper and discuss what message each cartoon has for us
27. Go through the newspaper and count the number of happy faces and the number of sad faces. Make an album of happy faces and sad faces.

### *Headline*



28. Look through the newspapers and collect what you think are funny or unusual headlines. Cut out words to make up funny headlines.
29. Make a book of alphabet. Write the letter Aa; letter Bb to Zz. Cut out words beginning with different letters. Paste them in your alphabet book in alphabetical order.
30. Look for ten headline words beginning with different letters. Paste them in your alphabet book in alphabetical order.
31. Write a sentence. Cut out from the newspaper the same words in your sentence. Paste it in your notebook and read it to your friend.
32. Cut out as many headline words as you can. Try to make a sentence with the ones you know. Ask your teacher or friends to help you with the ones you don't know.
33. Make a puzzle by cutting out a headline that you can read. Cut the words apart and mix them up. Give the words to your friend to put back together.
34. Find all the headline words from a page. Cut them out and paste on the chart. You can exchange the chart with your friend. Read the words out.;
- .
35. Cut out letters from the newspaper to write your name. Cut out letters to make your friend's name. Paste the letter on a piece of paper and give to your friend.
36. Cut out many headline words and put them into a paper bag. Choose five words and paste them on top of your page. Write a story using the words.
37. Imagine what you think might happen to you in future. Make up headlines about things that might happen to you.
38. Write the names of people in your family. Beside each name, paste a word from the newspaper to tell something good about him/her.
39. Write a sensational headline; for example, sweet Tree and Biscuit tree discovered . Write the news story and draw the pictures.

### *Family Section*

40. Make up a fashion story about Easter, Xmas or Wedding in your town. Underline the describing words.
41. Be a fashion designer. Draw and describe clothes for your friends. Cut them out and make a surprise gift to your friends.
42. Write a wedding description of somebody in your family for the newspaper. Say who wedded and who was at the wedding party; what they were wearing.
- f
43. Write your favourite food for the newspaper. Describe how it is prepared. Send copies of your recipe to your best friends or to Maggi Kitchen.
44. Make a T.V. advertisement on your favourite food. Draw good pictures and use good words to describe your favourite food so that people will want to taste.
45. Go through the newspaper and cut out photographs of families staying together. Paste them in your scrapbook.
  - (i) Discuss what each family is doing
  - (ii) How do you think they feel?
  - (iii) Why do you think they feel that way?
46. Suggest the kinds of food or drinks you would like families to have and why?
47. Cut pictures of the houses you would like your family to live in. Write a short description of the houses and why you like them.
48. Find pictures of furniture you would like to use to furnish your home and paste them in your notebook the way you would like them arranged in your home.
49. Cut out news stories about houses/homes. Paste them on the notice-board and discuss the stories with your friends.
50. Find pictures and stories about places your families would like to visit. Describe how you will get there.
51. Find things in the newspaper that suggest how to take care of a house/home. Write them down and display on your notebook.

52. Find announcement of births, marriages, and obituaries and change of names, in the newspaper. Count the number of births, deaths and marriages.

### *The Community*

53. Make a list of community-based development projects in your community, example, schools, maternity homes, hospital, town-halls, etc. Make a notice-board display of the projects.
54. Make a list of all the local markets in your community. Draw five products found in the market.
55. Draw pictures of important people in your community and say what they do.
56. Draw and paste on your bulletin board, pictures of animals in your community. Write short stories about them.
57. List materials and equipment needed to build houses in your community.
58. List the names of other communities surrounding your community.
59. Find out and write stories about the important people who lived in your community before you were born, why were they important?
60. If you have done anything to help your community, write a news story about it or about what you would like to do to help your community.
61. Organize a play or dance for your community members, write an advertisement about it and give it to your local newspaper to publish it for you.
62. Prepare a clean-up advertisement and give to a local radio station to announce it for you. A variety of other themes such as annual feasts and seasons of the year can also provide sources of activities for the neo-literates.

### *Entertainment*

63. Write to your T.V. station and request for a T.V. guide. Copy down the names and times of your favourite programmes.
64. Name ten restaurants you have heard of and write down at least five of them that are advertised in the newspaper or T.V. Say which one you would like to visit and why.
65. Cut out advisements of things you would like the members of your family to get involved in or participate in doing. Tell how you will get them involved.

66. Cut out five different items from the advertisement section of newspapers. Note the prices. Paste the items on a plain chart in order, starting from the cheapest to the most expensive. Paste the prices beside the items.
67. Find out current price of some common food items in the market. Make a shopping list of what you need for your family. Say how much you need to buy them.
68. Make a list of things in the newspaper that help us in the home.
69. Draw a funny cartoon about what is happening in your community. Write what the people are saying.
70. Make up a cartoon and ask your friend to guess who the cartoon characters are and what they may be saying.
71. Choose a comic and interpret what story it tells. Compare your interpretation with that of your friend.
72. Cut out a comic and paste it on your notebook. Write what you think is happening. Show this to your class.
73. Cut a comic strip into parts and give to your friend to put them back.

### *Sports*

74. Think of all the different sports you know or have heard about. How many of them are mentioned in today's newspapers? How many of them can you play? Name them.
75. You have watched a wrestling match, and listened to the commentator about the match. Draw the scene and write your own comments.
76. Imagine that you are watching a football match or a wrestling match, make the comments you might hear if you were there.
77. Draw a picture of spectators after watching a tough game. Describe how you think the people are feeling and why you think they feel that way.
78. Write a sports story about the game you play very well. Draw pictures about it and think of a good headline for it.
79. Find a picture of a sports team from your State. Cut and paste it on the class noticeboard.
80. Make a scrapbook with the title "My Favourite Sports Heroes", Write three sentences about each of the heroes.

81. Make a collection of stories on your favourite sports. Read them to your class.
82. Describe your favourite game and the rules of the game to your class.
83. Imagine that you are a sports reporter. Write a story about a famous sports man. Remember to write the heading too.

### *Number Concept*

84. Look through the advertisement pages, cut out all the examples of numerals.
85. Cut out the numbers 1 to 9 and paste them one after the other on your notebook.
86. Skim through a newspaper and write down the number of pages in it.
87. Make a scrapbook and number the pages 1 to 9. Cut from the newspaper one object for page one, two objects for page two and three for page three and so on.
88. Work in pairs and cut as many numerals as possible from the advertisement pages. Put them in a paper bag and take turns in pulling numbers; whoever has the highest number keeps it. The lower number is put back in the bag. Continue the game until all the numbers have been used up. The person who has the most, wins.
89. Work in pairs. Cut as many numerals as possible from the newspaper. Put them in a bag. Then write the numerals 1 to 9 on your paper. Take turns and pull numerals from the bag and match your numerals on paper. Whoever matches all nine first, wins.

### **Functional Literacy**

In the area of Functional Literacy defined earlier in this lecture, I developed the course *Methods and Materials in Adult Education* for the final year students in Adult Education. The purpose of the course is to enable the graduates of Adult Education to be able not only to impart the skills of literacy and numeracy to the non reader but also to impart some functional skills. In that way, the non-reader learns and appreciates that reading and writing can help in practical and concrete ways to make a living in a variety of skills and crafts. Functional literacy also inspired my research and publication titled *Earning a Living with Scraps: An Orientation for School Leavers and Dropouts*. The principle behind this is the popular saying; "waste not, want not". Unemployment has today become a recognized national problem among school leavers and school dropouts. A survey of the job situation among youths and dropouts by the Federal government of Nigeria and the World Bank in which I was involved found out that an overwhelming number of school leavers and dropouts in Nigeria are unemployed and unemployable. The problem of unemployment can be reduced with little skills, initiative, and imagination through the use of "scraps" for self reliance. There are many ways one can use pieces of cloths that are too small to

save but too good to throw away, to produce sewed items that can be sold to make money or given as gift items. Other scraps such as eggshells, sea shells, pieces of zinc, can be used to produce saleable items for decoration. An answer to unemployment is self-employment through the acquisition of relevant skills and initiatives. To do this, the non-reader, the dropout, must be provided with the opportunities for the acquisition of appropriate skills. He or she must also be oriented to proper appreciation of the dignity of labour and the pride of self-reliance. Embarking on simple and not expensive projects for a start, is a key to a successful self-employment. More attention in the area of research is needed in our environment on ways and means to prepare our illiterates and school dropouts and equip them for the world of work and for self reliance in the society.

### **What Needs To Be Done: The Challenges**

In his preface to a book titled: *The State of Education in Nigeria* (1998), the UNESCO Representative in Nigeria, E. Apea, said:

When this project was first conceived, we were motivated by an instinct that the educational scene was "all activity but little action". It is evident that Nigeria, hand in hand with the international community, lacks not ideas but the means and perhaps, the will to execute the many plans and ideas.

From the above statement one can infer that in the area of adult education, inadequate commitment to its development as a veritable tool for national development is, to some extent, responsible for the continued poverty, and underdevelopment in Nigeria. Nigeria has, at various times, launched such programmes as Family Economic Advancement Programme, Better Life for Rural Women, People's Bank, Community Bank, Micro-Credit Loan Scheme, Primary Health Care Scheme. The question to ask is "how many of the people for whom such programmes and projects are established are equipped to benefit from them?. The answer is, "very few indeed"; hence such initiatives have little or no impact on the life of the ordinary citizen. The reason for this is the prevalence of mass illiteracy in Nigeria.

To fight illiteracy, I am strongly recommending a revisit of Professor Babs Fafunwa's 1990's proposal of *Each—One-Teach-One or Fund the Teaching of One*. According to Fafunwa, to do this, "we have to think crazy". *Each-One-Teach-One* was initiated to have a chain reaction and a geometric progression effect, whereby an educated person assists one illiterate to become literate. The new literate then takes the teaching of another illiterate to produce a multiplier effect. Another dimension of the strategy proposed is "funding the teaching of one". This implies that literate persons who cannot personally participate in a literacy programme, would be expected to invest in literacy work by sponsoring services rendered by another for the imparting of literacy skills in some person or persons.

This proposal, like many others before it, generated a good deal of interest, seminars, and workshops, but eventually crumbled and died.. I recommend its resuscitation because it would involve the effective participation of all citizens in adult education programmes in the country. It would also address such other problems as insufficient awareness of the magnitude of illiteracy on the part of those who should know. Surprisingly, many educated

and literate Nigerians seem to be ill-informed or unconcerned about the disadvantages of illiteracy and its debilitating effects on the nation as a whole. Although this approach is by no means easy; it can be made compulsory and mandatory and enforced by the government; like the National Youth Service Programme. Government policy-direction and guidance would, therefore, be necessary for a massive mobilization of literacy volunteers over an extended period. This could work the magic. Political parties, national societies, volunteer organizations, clubs and enlightened people would be persuaded to participate in the campaign whether in person or by donating resources. Churches and Mosques, would be invited to identify with the literacy efforts. Religious leaders could make indelible impressions in the literacy campaign through purposeful sermons, meetings with the congregation and raising funds through church collections and subscriptions. International bodies such as the UNESCO could be appealed to for help in such programmes as a national literacy survey and the publication of useful books or the provision of necessary materials for literacy.

The Age-set system, as a grass-root based mobilization agency, is a very effective means of reaching the rural populace. One of its numerous advantages is the ability to create a new environment and change from the status-quo within which the commitment of the community to a programme of action can be achieved. As an institution of influence, the Age-set is a depository of cultural and religious traditions, of history and myth, and of contemporary pronouncements which emphasize the need for a literate society. The Age-sets can promote the campaign to eradicate illiteracy through fashioning suitable slogans or symbols on the advantages of literacy or the disadvantages of illiteracy for its members. For example, the Oganihu (Progressive) Age Grade of Okirika Nweke in Ahiazu Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State has the well-known saying that "Onye n' amaghi agu maghi ede, ikpe mara ya". (The person who cannot read and write is blameable). Such slogans have strong influence on members of the Age-set and impel the illiterate ones to strive to learn to read and write. Age-sets are also very well placed to use traditional facilities to create awareness of and commitment to the programme.

Age-set halls and village squares can be used to hold rallies for promoting the campaign against illiteracy. Village drummers, town criers and griots among the various Age-sets can be called upon to alert the members of the community during times and hours of literacy lessons and to advertise them. Since the decisions of the Age-sets are mandatory and binding on members, Age-sets can adopt resolutions that each illiterate member must attend literacy classes and each literate member should undertake to teach one or two illiterates, and the Age-set will fund the teaching. The Age-sets can undertake to paste literacy messages on the walls of their halls and market squares, or to carry such messages on their bicycles or display them at other strategic places within the community. Age-sets which have formed successful and well known dance groups can use such groups to compose praise songs for literacy or satirical ones against illiteracy. A good example of this is the Abigbo Mbaise Dance Group of Ekwerazu in Ahiazu-Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State which has composed many famous songs in praise of the man of learning and many others to express pity and commiseration for the *itiboribo* (the illiterate) who operates in the world of today where everything is done in writing.

By direct actions and subtle pressures, Age-sets can motivate their members and indeed others to commit themselves and resources to achieve literacy within a well-organized national programme of *Each One Teach One or Fund the Teaching of One* in order to eradicate illiteracy.

Another action that requires urgent attention now is a National Illiteracy Survey in order to update the UNESCO illiteracy figures of 2005 mentioned earlier. The survey should specifically:

- i) determine the extent and distribution of adult illiteracy among persons aged 15 years and above.
- ii) identify problems and issues of concern which can help to promote literacy education in Nigeria.
- iii) collate accurate and comprehensive data and information on institutions or persons who provide adult education.

A Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), *Literacy Initiative Network Connection Services (LINCS)*, of which I am coordinator, is currently designing a methodology, survey instruments and proposals which could help in the National Illiteracy Survey. In order to monitor the success of the campaign to eradicate illiteracy in the country, it is recommended that such a survey be carried out every five years.

## **Conclusion**

This lecture has focused on Nigeria as a predominantly illiterate society. It has highlighted the dimensions of illiteracy in both the traditional and the new concept of "neo-illiterates". In spite of the efforts made from the colonial period to the present, mass illiteracy has defied attempt at solution. That is because the attempts have not been in proportion to the magnitude of the problem.

My own studies, researches and considerable publications in my twenty eight years of academic career in the University, have addressed the issues of illiteracy and adult education and proposed ways to approach the eradication of illiteracy. I have endeavoured in my lectures and teachings to sensitize and prepare new generations of adult educators to appreciate the challenges of illiteracy and how to eradicate it in our society. The numerous students I have produced in Adult Education and the numerous Ph.D and M.Ed graduates in Education do attest to this.

The dangers of illiteracy are now well-known and the proposed solutions to the problem of illiteracy have been clearly articulated. What is lacking, in my opinion, is the national consciousness, the national consensus and the political will to address the problem appropriately.

The co-relation between illiteracy and poverty is no longer in dispute. An illiterate society will always be a poverty-stricken society. In this day and age, we know that no literate society is classified as underdeveloped, just as no illiterate society is classified as developed,



because development is a factor of creative and productive human mind which cannot flower and blossom in illiteracy.

In spite of Nigeria's vast human and natural resources, in spite of well-publicized policies and programmes to eradicate poverty in the nation, the vast majority of Nigerians still live in abject poverty, as a result of illiteracy. Therefore, unless the issue of mass illiteracy is adequately and appropriately dealt with there is the danger that Nigeria will, for long, continue to be a nation of unrealized hopes and unfulfilled promises. Our hope and prayer is that this will not be the lot of our nation. That is our prayer through Christ our Lord, Amen.

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Vice-Chancellor, Sir,

May I use this opportunity to appreciate the people who have contributed in various capacities and in no small measures to make me what I am today.

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To my students especially the numerous Masters and Ph.Ds. many of whom are here today, to my colleagues in the Faculty of Education and the Department of Adult Education, and to all who have in various capacities enriched my academic career, I say a sincere "thank you".

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To all present, I say thank you for your presence and your kind attention.

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