

Functional Literacy for Women Education through English Language in the era of Globalization

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Abstract. The main thrust of this paper is to examine the use of English in women literacy programme in Nigeria as it relates to globalization with a view to identifying issues of concern. Methods of assessment involve the use of questionnaire to gather women's opinion of their literacy development through the use of varieties of English. 1,500 women were randomly selected, using the stratified random sampling technique, across the six geopolitical regions of Nigeria. Findings reveal that more women are becoming literate but literacy among women has gone beyond just learning speaking, reading, and writing English. Women literacy currently involves learning about social networking, business strategies, political and domestic issues. Also, the Nigerian English variety and Nigerian Pidgin English are mostly the media of instruction. Although, many literacy centres are organised privately by NGOs, a few centres are government owned. Hence, there are no structured and standard curricula. The study revealed that only 15.2 per cent of the women population is aware of the existence of any literacy programme. About the same small proportion (15.5 per cent) is aware of the existence of any literacy centres. Comparative analysis among the states shows that states in the North had relatively higher level of awareness of literacy programmes. It is recommended that more attention should be given to women literacy especially in rural areas for total involvement and curriculum

standardization. It is hoped that findings from this study will be needful for policy makers, planners and other researchers in other fields of education.

Key words: Functional Literacy; Women Literacy programme; Globalization; Use of English.

1. Introduction

Nigerian women play important roles in national development in spite of the fierce challenges posed by globalization which has no consideration for gender. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to their literacy level, its present status and its operations. Underlying this is the fact that literacy is fundamental to information dissemination, socio-economic development and poverty alleviation among others. Literacy is an indispensable catalyst needed for development and democracy to grow. Literacy is also critical for any successful poverty eradication strategy. Similarly, the educational level of mothers has a direct relationship with the education of the children and significantly determines the health status of the entire family. It is also pertinent to examine the use of English language for women literacy as it is the only national language in Nigeria and the language of instruction in all our educational levels and most importantly, it is the globalized language. Literacy assessment in

Nigeria reveals there are many ethnic groups with different languages as well as cultural differences.

In Nigeria, Huebler (2008) discovers that 55% of the population aged 15 years and older can read and write according to the findings of a Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) conducted in 2003. Findings show that more men (67%) than women (44%) are literate, and the literacy rate is higher in urban (71%) than in rural areas (47%). In the survey, literacy is defined as the ability to "read and write in any language with understanding" (NPC and ORC Macro 2004: 247). It was also revealed from the 2003 survey that among 15- to 19-year-olds, the female literacy rate is 63% while the male literacy rate is 79%. Therefore, while literacy rates have increased steadily for men and women, there continues to be a large gender gap. This gap continues until 2005 because according to UNESCO's (2005) figures, there are more than 161 million illiterates in Nigeria out of which 64.5% are women above 15 years of age and 43.3 are males. Literacy rate of adult females (% of females ages 15 and above) in Nigeria in 2009 was measured at 49.81, according to the World Bank.

In 2010, a national literacy survey was conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics collaborated with the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC), and Media & Marketing Communications Company (MMCC) GROUP where a sample of 100 household per LGA yielded the national sample of 77,400 households for the survey. The response rate of 99.4 per cent was achieved as 76,950 were successfully interviewed. Findings reveal Adult Literacy Rates at the following categories: – National adult literacy rate in English Language stood at 57.9% (Male 65.1; Female 50.6); – National adult literacy rate in any language stood at 71.6% (Male 79.3; Female 63.7). The rates for males are higher than those of females. The rates are also higher in urban than in the rural areas.

Literacy involves the skill of reading, writing and computing. The skill of literacy and that of oracy have existed side by side for a very long time. As noted by Oyejide (1997), literacy culture has gained ascendancy over the oracy

culture. For as long as people live in small groups, villages, communities, with little or no noticeable linkages, oral culture persisted and was adequate since members understood the monolingual groups as existed. The cultures were then handed down orally through generations. But this is not so in the contemporary world as communities have assumed language dimensions and have mingled for commerce and industry: wars have taken place resulting in conquest and absorption or colonization of weaker communities. Communities thus became bilingual or multilingual. Communication becomes more difficult. In such situation, oracy was becoming inadequate and inefficient, thus, there is need for the culture of literacy, because there is need to put down in writing form the history, political and economic practices from one generation to the other which cannot be retained in human memory. Because of this, it is now clear that literacy culture has gained tremendous ascendancy over oracy culture. And to meaningfully participate in politics, commerce, religion, education, business and so on, requires literacy.

2. Current Trend in Women Literacy in Nigeria

UNESCO (1990) defines a literate person as one who can read and write a short simple sentence (with understanding) on his everyday life. However, the whole concept of literacy goes beyond this simple definition as it now covers other skills such as knowledge about health and nutrition, understanding business and credits accounts, agricultural techniques and new technology; hence, it is functional literacy. Functional literacy gives female citizens opportunities to efficiently raise and get the best out of their families and communities. It is a means of self-improvement, which is aimed at transforming, constructing and reconstructing experience (Adeniyi 2017). It is intended at production and is usually worked out through production of projects. Thus, functional literacy covers more than reading and writing.

Currently, also, Anugwom (2009) reveals that Nigerian women are making so much advancement within their society. In recent

years, three male dominated professions, the Nigerian Medical Association, the Nigerian Bar Association and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria, have been led by female presidents. She is of the opinion that the government effort of creating the National Commission for Women and providing a ministerial portfolio for Women Affairs establish additional avenues for the promotion of women's educational issues and the enhancement of the role of women in national development by way of a statutory body and a Ministry. Notwithstanding, Nigerian women's access to formal education is still being constrained due to their unfair workload within the household division of labour.

3. Possible factors responsible for Nigerian Literacy gender gaps

Many factors have been identified as contributing to this state of imbalance in Nigerian literacy. This includes discrimination against women in education, poverty, oppression of women, patriarchal ideologies and social systems, burdens of domestic responsibility like frequent child birth, the attitude of men and so on.

It is an obvious fact that children performance even at secondary and university level is related to the level of educational attainment of their parents, especially that of the mother. It is no wonder therefore that the result of billions of naira being spent on formal schooling has not quite justified the huge expenditure on education since the parents of the children in schools have been neglected. As long as mothers are illiterate so long shall we continue to have high rate of school drop outs from our schools and sets of hooligans and touts in our society.

On identifying the peculiar needs of the target audience (i.e. women) Thompson (1981) as cited by Onyewuto (1997) identified four kinds of learning needs for women especially in rural areas.

- General or basic education - which include literacy, numeracy and understanding of one's society and environment
- Family improvement education aimed at developing the knowledge, skills and

attitudes which will help raise people standard of health, nutrition and home making, child care, family planning etc. In order to improve their domestic life.

- Community improvement education- aimed at providing for the strengthening of local and national institution and organization to enable people especially women to participate more effectively in civic affairs.
- Occupational education serve to assist women make a better living for themselves and to contribute more effectively to the economic development of their communities and countries.

4. Language use in Nigerian Literacy Programmes

English is the most widely used and most highly regarded language in the world. The global spread of the domineering impact of English is undeniable. English is the international lingual Franca and the main means of communication across cultures and borders. English is perceived as triumphing over Finnish in Finland (Moore and Varatola, 2005). Also, there is a wide spread perception that contemporary German is subjected to intense influence from English (Stephen, 2005). Supporting this view, Jeremy (2005) comments that Spanish is under pressure from English. The result is the emergence of a hybrid form known as 'Spanglish', (Michael 2005). From the foregoing, it is very obvious that English is a global language. The use of English for educating non English speakers especially in Nigeria requires special attention and careful consideration and this has attracted fruitful efforts from Nigerians.(Adeniyi 2011).

English language is the accepted language of instruction at all levels of education in Nigeria. It is the best international and globalized language; no other language has ever succeeded in uniting Nigeria together like English. The National Policy on Education encourages multilingualism via mother tongue education at the initial stages of education and even with the effective implementation of the language policy. The emergence of a single national language is a

forlorn hope. Nigeria belongs to the international community. She has neighbours and interacts with people from within and without her boundaries. Our technology is still foreign based. It is therefore pertinent to be literate in at least one international language, hence the choice is English.

Instead of canvassing for the use of indigenization of English, Nigerian English could be standardized to function excellently well in the global village. It is easier to train local women in this medium of Nigerian English because certain cultural elements has been injected into it, the linguistic elements too has been modified i.e. the tone, rhythm and stress. Teachers should be properly trained through this medium, so that they could be competent enough to train the women on how to read, write, count and communicate in English Language.

The importance of English language as an international lingua franca and the main means of communication across cultures are incontestable for Nigerian women to be versed in the use of this language. Using an indigenous language of first language for women literacy, especially in the rural area may not be in alliance with the demand of globalization. This is contrary to Afolayan's (1978) assertion that literacy for women, especially in the rural areas, should be in the first language. His reason for this is that the burden of learning a second language simultaneously with learning to read and write complicates the process of literacy acquisition. He stresses further that teachers operating in the second language may not have had a competent grasp of it how much more imparting knowledge to others in it. All these excuses are not tenable considering the recent challenges posed by globalization.

For the Nigeria women to survive in this complex world, they need to participate in politics, enjoy economic fairness, be involved in communication technology, commerce, education, business, health and banking. All these require the medium of English language, more so when Nigeria has not accepted national language. Much as this paper converses for a common language which is English, it does not lose the sight of the advantages that are inherent

in multi-lingualism. Therefore, the Nigerian indigenous languages could be developed locally. Well-meaning Nigerians can build a library and equip it with updated materials like magazines, journals and novels (both African and foreign) so that the rural women can use it without any financial implications. In addition to this, local government chairmen could be encouraged to proclaim literacy years in their local government areas for women and award honors and medals on such occasions.

5. Globalization and Functional Literacy

Globalization as a concept is multifarious. It involves such far reaching events as the schism in Christianity maritime travel, rise of the nation-state, global exploration, colonization, international relation, international communication, mass transition, outbreak of war, space explorations and developing series of communities based on race, ethnicity and so on which cut across national and state boundaries. Globalization is thus multidimensional, but its economic aspect, according to Lawal (2005), has received the greatest attention as it is the much as other facets, the proof of which revolves other processes of knitting the world together and producing, through unity in diversity, a global village. From the linguistic point of view, globalization is the increased integration of the various speech communities in the world facilitated among other things by breakthrough via linguistic interaction. Globalization thus helps in removing all bottle necks to flow of information. In this paper, therefore, globalization is seen as unity of mankind brought about by the overall development of the human race intellectually, cognitively, socially, culturally and technologically through the use of a common language, which is English language. The current wave of globalization has greatly improved the lives of women worldwide, particularly the lives of those women in the developing world such as Nigeria in Africa. Nevertheless, women remain disadvantaged in many areas of life, including education, employment, health, and civil rights. According to the U.S. Agency for International Development and the World Bank, 57 percent of the 72 million primary school aged children who

do not attend school are females. Additionally, girls are four percent less likely than boys to complete primary school (Gender statistics, 2010). In particular, care for women during maternity is still lacking in many parts of the world. Approximately 529,000 women die annually during pregnancy and childbirth (Gender statistics, 2010).

Countries with the lowest maternal mortality rate (deaths per 100,000 live births) include Estonia (2), Singapore (3) and Greece (3), while the highest maternal mortality rates can be found in Chad (1,100), Somalia (1,000) and Sierra Leone (890) (CIA World Factbook). In order to reduce gender disparities, the UN's Millennium Development Goals prioritize gender equality and empowerment of women. In particular, Millennium Development Goal Three purports to "promote gender inequality and empower women." As part of the Millennium Goals, the international community, especially the UN, will monitor several indicators of gender equality including the levels of female enrollment at school, participation in the workplace, and representation in decision-making positions and political institutions. Progress on these goals has been uneven, especially for women and girls.

More recently, means to monitor the progress of both the understanding of and the struggle to remedy women's problems have been implemented. Other documents deal with specific challenges to women's rights. For example, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women vows to guarantee women equal rights with men in all spheres of life, including education, employment, health care, suffrage, nationality, and marriage.

In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly voted to create a new UN entity for gender equality and empowerment of women entitled UN Women (<http://www.unwomen.org/>). Its role is to support intergovernmental bodies in policy formation, help member states implement new standards and regulations, and hold the UN system accountable for gender equality.

As earlier mentioned, literacy is not only the ability to read and write only English, but rather

for one to become informed, scholarly and erudite if he can source for information written on paper. Globalization partly has to do with the ability of or ease of man to get informed about event around him. It will be a wasted effort to get the race of man linguistically subjugated rather than getting them informed via a language understood by man. Attention should be therefore getting the human race educated and not linguistically relegated. Education, according to Ehusoni (2002), is the development of the mind and consequently the globe. To this end, men will enjoy living in that global village not only when they can communicate using one language, but also when all the people, especially women, have had their skill developed such that they see themselves as useful personalities in the small village called the globe.

6. Methodology

This study is a survey and the instruments used are the household questionnaire and structured interview that targeted 3,000 randomly selected women in homes and individuals across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria: North East, North Central, South-South, South West, South East zones. The questionnaire was structured in English Language but the interviewers who guided samples through the questionnaire were trained to translate and conduct the interview in local languages. For this purpose, interviewers were recruited based on the ability to speak, in addition to English language, the language of the environment where they would administer the questionnaire and conduct the interviews.

The stratified random sampling technique was used in order to have a uniform spread of women across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. 500 women were selected in each zone.

7. Results and Findings

The result shows that among the States, Imo State had the highest literacy rate in English while Lagos had the highest literacy rate in any other language. In other words, the immediate language apart from English is commonly used in Lagos being an heterogeneous society which is the Nigerian Pidgin English. Among the six

geo-political Zones in Nigeria, South East had the highest literacy rate in English while South West had the highest literacy rate in any other language (Yoruba language, (Oyo dialect) is prevalent). North West had the least literacy rate in English Language, whereas North Central had the least literacy rate in any other language. The adult literacy rate in English language stood at 57.9 per cent. Imo and Lagos States had the

highest adult literacy rates of 80.8 per cent and 80.5 per cent respectively, while Sokoto had the least rate of 22.1 per cent. As usual, males had higher literacy rate of 65.1 per cent compared to females' 50.6 per cent. The gap between the urban and rural residents is 69.4 per cent in the urban area, and 38.5 per cent in the rural.

Table 1: WOMEN LITERACY RATE IN ENGLISH BY GEO POLITICAL ZONE

Geo Political Zone	Literacy in English %
North Central	47.3
North East	33.4
North West	23.2
South East	67.5
South South	66.7
South West	62.6
NATIONAL	50.6

Source: National Literacy Survey, 2010

Table 2: WOMEN LITERACY RATE BY STATE BY GEO POLITICAL ZONE

NORTH CENTRAL	
State	Literacy in English %
Benue	59.4
Kogi	59.1
Kwara	30.7
Nasarawa	35.8
Niger	32.4
Plateau	51.9
FCT	47.8
OVERALL	47.3

Source: National Literacy Survey, 2010

Table 3: WOMEN LITERACY RATE BY STATE BY GEO POLITICAL ZONE

NORTH EAST	
State	Literacy in English%
Adamawa	48.1
Bauchi	17.1
Borno	32.7
Gombe	27.6
Taraba	44.2
Yobe	16.7
OVERALL	33.4

Source: National Literacy Survey, 2010

Table 4: WOMEN LITERACY RATE BY STATE BY GEO POLITICAL ZONE

NORTH WEST	
State	Literacy in English %
Jigawa	18.3
Kaduna	44.4
Kano	19.0
Katsina	20.1
Kebbi	19.0
Sokoto	14.0
Zamfara	18.8
OVERALL	23.2

Source: National Literacy Survey, 2010

Table 5: WOMEN LITERACY RATE BY STATE BY GEO POLITICAL ZONE

SOUTH EAST	
State	Literacy in English
Abia	69.8
Anambra	68.3
Ebonyi	62.3
Enugu	58.1
Imo	76.1
OVERALL	67.5

Source: National Literacy Survey, 2010

Table 6: WOMEN LITERACY RATE BY STATE BY GEO POLITICAL ZONE

SOUTH-SOUTH	
State	Literacy in English%
Akwa Ibom	70.2
Bayelsa	67.6
CRiver	70.0
Delta	59.8
Edo	53.1
Rivers	76.0
OVERALL	66.7

Source: National Literacy Survey, 2010

Table 7: WOMEN LITERACY RATE BY STATE BY GEO POLITICAL ZONE

SOUTH-WEST	
State	Literacy in English%
Ekiti	56.2
Lagos	75.3
Ogun	60.3
Ondo	58.1
Osun	50.1
Oyo	56.9
OVERALL	62.6

Source: National Literacy Survey, 2010

Findings also reveal that 15 % of women are actually aware of women literacy programmes or it may be that this percentage represents women who seem to be interested in developing themselves against all odds.

Literacy centres in cities had better facilities and higher number of instructors than were available in rural areas. Curricula differ across zones. Methods and mediums of teaching also vary. While English is the medium of instruction and curricula include specialized and technical subjects in cities, Nigerian Pidgin and indigenous languages were used more in rural

areas and curricula are limited to just reading and writing.

Proximity of literacy centres to individual homes is closer in cities than in rural areas. Also, transportation facilities abound in cities while movement from homes to centres is much more difficult in rural areas.

Literacy centres for women are either owned by government or NGO. While NGOs' activities are prevalent in cities, government literacy centres are found more in rural areas. This may explain why women literacy centres in cities seem to have more attention.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Schultz (2002) asserts that rapid socio-economic development of a nation has been observed to depend on the caliber of women and their education in that country. In the same vein, Nussbaum (2003) and Aliu (2001) believe that education bestows on women a disposition for a lifelong acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills.

The level of a woman's literacy reflects the level of poverty in her family; and when the woman is literate, the chain of marginalization, slavery and poverty would be broken. Literacy brings about self-development. It helps to develop the spirit of independence, confidence and self-reliance in its recipient. A literate woman enjoys her privacy and confidentiality as she is able to read and write her own mails, save and cash money in banks, sign her own names and process documents. It also enables her to visit the doctor privately and read prescriptions on drugs, read safety instructions, read danger signs and save her from embarrassment and cowardly death.

The following recommendations are suggested to promote women literacy programmes in the country:

- The Federal Government should give more emphasis to women literacy programmes in the development agenda;
- Literacy education of women should be available in the formal and non-formal education and made a key sub-sector of education in Nigeria with requisite recognition and status;
- Government should establish women literacy centers in every Local Government Area in the country and qualified teachers should be recruited to meet the work force requirement in both formal and non-formal education institute;
- In-service training should be available for women literacy teachers to equip them with requisite skills and knowledge to offer quality teaching and motivate learners;
- Finally, women literacy should not just be shared responsibility of government

alone, Civil Society, Faith-Based Organizations, Private Sector, Individuals and Communities should also contribute to the human capital development and the provision of conducive and quality learning environment.

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