

EDUCATION FOR SPECIAL TARGET GROUPS: A SURE PATH TO CURBING ILLITERACY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examine education for Special Target Groups as a sure part to curbing illiteracy in Nigeria. In addition, the paper discussed causes of illiteracy in Nigeria, few among which were poverty, inadequate access to educational facilities and culture. Moreover, the devastating consequences illiteracy can cause on the people and the society at large, were also revealed in this paper such as; inability to participate in high-tech jobs, lack of access to basic information and social misfit. This paper also exposed the various inclusive components and programmes of Education for Special Target Groups, which include; Adult Education, Women Education, Nomadic Education, Prison Education, among others. However, Education for Special Target Groups is faced with some challenges such as; poor funding, inadequacy of professional personal and lack of government blue-print on sub-cultural groups. This paper made some recommendations that will promote Education for Special Target Groups and consequently curb illiteracy, among which were; Adequate funding, Recruitment, training and retraining of professionals, timely publicity and sensitization.

Keywords: Education for Special Target Groups, illiteracy, curbing, Nigeria

Introduction

Education develops a country's economy and society, it is therefore, the cornerstone of a nation's development. Education provides knowledge and skills to the population, as well as shaping the personality of its youths of a nation. Education is very important for an individual's success in life. Education is generally seen as the foundation of society which brings economic wealth, social prosperity and political stability. Economic and social status depends on education obtained by individual since education contributes to individual capability in managing quality of life. It can help an individual to avoid poverty, build up harmony and democratic society. Education is also capable to give power to people to voice out their views, expose them to their real potential, lead them to become a better person and widen their views in certain areas of life and living.

However, in Nigeria, where 31 per cent of population is illiterate, and millions of children are out-of-school, it is another wake-up call on the national and sub-national governments to close the literacy gap (Punch, 8 September, 2023). Literacy, according to UNESCO, (2020) helps to reduce poverty, and has positive effects on health, the economy and sustainable development. Nigeria's education outlook is poor. The national literacy rate of 69 per cent as claimed by the Federal Government hides wide regional disparities. A National Bureau of Statistics (2022) report showed that Yobe had the lowest literacy level of 7.23 per cent in 2017, Zamfara 19.16 per cent, Katsina 10.36 per cent and Sokoto 15.01 per cent. Southern states were far better with Imo the highest with 96.43 per cent, Lagos 96.3

per cent, Ekiti 95.79 per cent, and Rivers 95.76 per cent. Little has changed since then. About one-third of primary school age children, drop out before reaching the Junior Secondary School, says UNICEF, and majority are female children from the Northern states.

Poverty, insecurity, kidnapping, child marriage and religious extremism have further sabotaged sustainable education in the country. In 2018, the Centre for Information Technology and Development said 72 per cent of children between the ages of six and 16 had never attended high school in Borno, 58 per cent in Yobe, and 52 per cent in Bauchi. UNICEF (2022) estimates 1.6 million out-of-school children in the North-Eastern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. The North-West has 3.5 million, the highest in the country; the North-East, 2.0 million, the North-Central 1.3 million. For two years running now, students in Sokoto and Zamfara have missed the major external examination because the two governments owed examination fees. The Southern states are remiss too. The South-West has 1.4 million out-of-school, South-South 1.2 million, and South-East 713,000. The South-West has lost its leadership in education. Nigeria's predicament is due to misplaced priorities. The Northern elite are fixated on political power, exploiting religious sentiments while neglecting education. There, underdevelopment, terrorism and banditry, and sectarian violence are prevalent. The current crop of South-West leaders have similarly jettisoned the region's legacy of free education deployed in the old Western Region and its successor off-shoots. Literacy rates are falling and out-of-school children numbers rising (Punch, 8th September, 2023).

Illiteracy is a big problem everywhere as reflected in national and international definition of illiteracy. Illiteracy is a serious social issue of the present era especially in the developing countries which Nigeria is one. Illiteracy is a social evil. It has very harmful effects on society. An illiterate person is unaware of the causes of his/her creation, does not know anything about his/her rights and duties. He does not understand law of the country and cannot make material progress in the world with the force of education and knowledge. He is unable to get good job in any public or govt. sector. Illiteracy is the "inability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying context (UNESCO, 2022).

Illiteracy as a worldwide educational phenomenon is one among many great social problems facing developing countries. Although much progress has been made in the late twentieth century, both through attempts at universalization of primary schooling and mass-scale provision of UBE in many developing countries, the absolute number of adult illiterates keeps increasing. Complete illiteracy means a person cannot read or write at all. Of equal relevance is the concept of functional illiteracy, which means an individual may have basic reading, writing and numerical skills but cannot apply them to accomplish tasks that are necessary to make informed choices and participate fully in everyday life. Illiteracy is a state of being whereby a person is not able to read and write. In short illiteracy is a situation where one lacks knowledge. People who have acquired basic education encountered challenges in reading and writing. Illiteracy also implies lack of knowledge in specific course of study. Mistakes in reading and writing are the characteristics of illiteracy. 1 out of 5 people are illiterates and 3 billion people in the world with basic education have difficulty in reading and writing. This has created economic, social and health effects for individuals and the society at large.

Illiteracy has been described as the lack of ability to read and write coherently and think critically about a written word. The effect of illiteracy can also include the inability to understand all forms of communication, be it body language, pictures, video & sound (reading, speaking, listening and viewing). Illiteracy encompasses a complex set of incapacities to understand and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture for personal and community development. Commentator Phawles (2018) put illiteracy as "powerlessness, low self-esteem, lack of confidence and isolation".

Special target groups are broadly understood as those whose educational needs are not sufficiently addressed by regular or mainstream literacy provisions. This means, that special target group are groups of people in the country who are educationally disadvantaged due to their location, activities and poor attention by the government. Certain children and youths in our society face certain unique circumstances that prevent them or make their attempt to realize their potential more difficult. These groups of children and youths suffer from societal indifference and or neglect. This is reflected educationally in the fact that many if not all of these children and youth graduate out of both primary and secondary school plagued with reading difficulties and subsequent subject performance based on reading skills. Learning problems, generally we know, can be due to environmental, cultural, economic deprivation, religious beliefs etc. These groups of children and youths are not legally included in the group referred to as handicapped, and so they are not covered by any legislation. They however, should be recognized as needing inclusion in the population of exceptional children i.e. those in need of special services to realize their potentials. These children and their families are referred to by a number of different terms including educationally, culturally and socially disadvantaged; culturally deprived and culturally different such as sub-cultural groups and children with special needs (Okai, Padang and Rukaya, 2016).

The objectives of Education for Special Target includes; To provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or (dropouts). These include the nomads, migrant families, the disable, and the disadvantaged gender. To provide functional and remedial education for those who did not complete secondary education. To present education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills. To provide in-service, on-the-job, vocational and professional trainings for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills, and to give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural, and civic education for public enlightenment (FGN, 2004).

Components and Programmes of Education for Special Target Groups

Adult Education: This is a programme under Education for Special Target Groups that deals with the entire body of organize educational process, whatever the content, level and method, formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges, universities as well as in apprenticeship, where by persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications and bring about changes in their attitude or behavior in the two fold perspectives of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development (Ejeh & Shaibu, 2017).

Women Education: Another component and programme of Education for Special Target Group is Women Education. Research has shown that the level of illiteracy among women is high. Women faced barriers experienced in cultural and religious discriminations.

Nomadic Education: This aspect of Education for Special Target Groups refers to educational programmes and initiatives designed to meet the unique needs of nomadic or semi-nomadic populations, such as pastoralists, hunter-gatherers, and other communities that move from frequently in search of resources or livelihoods.

Education for Migrant Fishermen: This is the type of education provided for men, women, children, and dependents who accompany their families to fishing ports and migrate to other conducive places as guaranteed by the season.

Distance Education: Distance education is the provision of education by a mode other than the

conventional face-to-face method but whose goals are similar to, and just as noble and practical as those of on campus full-time, part-time, graduate and undergraduate certifications and continuing education.

Special Education: Special Education is another components and programmes of Education for Special Target. It is the practice of educating students in a way that accommodates their individual differences, disabilities and special needs. Special education aims to provide accommodated education for disabled students such as learning disabilities, learning difficulties (such as dyslexia), communication disorders, emotional and behavioural disorders, physical disabilities (such as osteogenesis imperfect, cerebral palsy, lissencephaly, Sanfilippo syndrome and muscular dystrophy), developmental disabilities (such as autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disabilities) among others, (Ejeh & Shaibu, 2017)

Causes of Illiteracy

There is simultaneous interaction of a number of factors that can cause illiteracy. Chief among these are poverty, malnutrition, health problems, child labour, migration and lack of access to continuous teaching and learning environments. Illiteracy in individuals stems from different, generally inter-related causes which, together, create a series of often insurmountable barriers for those concerned.

Parents: A lot of illiterate parents do not value education and do not have interest in sending their children to school. This is known as intergenerational transmission of illiteracy. This happened in remote areas where people of the older generation did not attend school. (Isaac, 2022).

Family: This occurs to children who find it difficult to read and write due dyslexia. In this case the family conclude that the children are not clever and it is not everyone who will be able to attend school.

High Rate of Unemployment: Many people know the main purpose of education are to get good job in the future and make good life. If educated people are not getting job to do, then education becomes useless to those who think education is the means to make good life.

Unawareness: In rural areas where they are not enlightened about the essence of education. The rate of illiteracy in the urban centers is lower than the rural areas.

Barriers: A lot of social barriers like restriction on girl-child education. Girl child education has been a problem in some parts of the world which has led to formation of different organizations aimed at championing women's education.

Inadequate Access to Educational facilities: People who live in rural areas lack educational facilities which kill their interest in education.

Poverty: Poor parents find it hard to pay their children school fees and unable to provide their basic needs.

Medical problem: Dyslexia and dysorthographia cause illiteracy. Dyslexia is a medical condition where children find it hard to read. Dysorthographia is a medical condition whereby children find it difficult to write. Physical disability also causes illiteracy such as blindness, deafness and dumbness.

Parental support: Children whose parents are dead may be adopted by another family as slaves. When government does not make policies for these children, many of them become street beggars and criminals.

Culture: Some cultures are gender bais. Certain culture restricts girl-child education. They do not permit girl-child education.

Child-labor: A lot of children work to assist their parents at home. These children work for more hours and don't have time for education.

Geographical Factors: Household data from 42 countries show that rural children are twice as likely to be out of school as children living in urban areas (Isaac, 2022).

Consequences of Illiteracy

According to World Literacy Foundation (2015), illiteracy and low level of education was estimated

to cost the global economy about 800 Euro yearly. The global economy is developing to knowledge economy and literacy has become a tool for individuals and states to cope with the global economy. Illiteracy has a negative impact on a country's ability to develop its people resources in the global economy; countries with a high illiteracy rate are more likely to be disadvantaged if a population is illiterate, it will be unable to participate in high-tech jobs. New occupations in science, mathematics, and technology are predominantly established in countries with high literacy.

Another significant consequence of illiteracy is the lack of access to basic information, which is delivered through books, newspapers, and the Internet; Practical advice on how to improve one's quality of life, such as how to participate in microfinance programs could be included in this type of information. In short, illiteracy does not promote constructive societal transformation, personal growth, or language and cultural preservation and development. Illiteracy not only limits the full development of individuals and their participation in society, but also has repercussions throughout life, affecting a person's family environment, restricting access to the benefits of development, and hindering the enjoyment of other human rights.

Moreover, consequence of illiteracy is that many of the illiterate parents do not send their children to school and at certain point in time force their children to marry early. They do this so that the children will not become burden to them. Some of the parents regard early marriage as a way to get money to assist the rest of the family members. In some culture, the girl-child is regarded as a property whose job is to trade to help the family to make ends meet. This is common in areas where many people are illiterates. Most of the illiterate people find it hard to get good job which releases them from the cycle of poverty.

They find it difficult to provide for themselves the basic needs in life such as shelter, clothing and food. Also, Illiterate parents value work more than education and their children who are not able to complete school follow the footsteps of their parents. This causes cycle of illiteracy through generations. With regard to education, illiterate parents tend to have lower educational expectations and aspirations for themselves and for their children. Poor families often place work before education, due to the opportunity cost of the latter. Thus, children of parents who have failed to complete primary education tend to do the same. A close link has also been found to exist between parents' schooling and the academic performance of their children. As noted by Carneiro, Meghir and Parey (2017), the greater a mother's schooling, the fewer behavioural problems her children will exhibit, and the lower their repetition rate will be. When parents are uninvolved in their children's education, the latter are more likely to display behavioural problems, have poor grades, repeat school years and even discontinue their formal education.

According to (Lind, 2021), Illiteracy makes people to feel social misfit and become a tool of ridicule and experience stress. Illiteracy creates high rates of unemployment. Illiteracy creates high rate of drug abuse. Illiteracy is accepted as a disease to some people. Illiteracy makes society and nation to become undeveloped. People with low levels of education get poor jobs opportunities couple with low income. Illiterate adults face serious employability issues, given their low level of knowledge and expertise. This is attributable to a lack of formal schooling, caused either by an early departure from school to enter the labour market or the loss over time of the ability to read and write. This creates problems such as welfare dependency, low self-esteem and high rate of crime. Illiteracy causes poverty because education enables one to acquire skills and becomes qualified to do white-collar job and earns good salary. The illiterate people don't have this privilege and the responsibilities of the dependent family members creates burden.

The illiterate people are in danger in their daily lives and they refuse to vote during elections era. The

illiterates do not have knowledge about the political system and how it works. This hinders them to involve in the electoral system. Because the illiterates do not have knowledge, they don't care about their countries preventing them not to vote. According to studies few people vote during elections time and the illiterates are included. The illiterates find it difficult to understand ideas and unable to make contribution.

Illiteracy among adults increases present and future socioeconomic vulnerability, and is a significant factor in the reproduction of such vulnerability through children. Illiterate persons face greater obstacles in terms of social insertion, not only on a personal level (social inclusion difficulties, precarious work, high rates of disease, etc.), but also within the family (child nutrition, hygiene, health and schooling, among others) and at a societal level (lower productivity, high health care costs). Child mortality is common among illiterate mothers and maternal mortality is also common in rural areas among illiterate women (UNESCO, 2019).

Illiterate people experience higher rates of workplace accidents (WLF, 2015) because they do not understand the written instructions concerning machines' operation, putting their health and their colleagues at risk. Not using safety equipment increases not only the risk of accidents but also work-related illnesses. This increases the need for medical services (and its associated costs) and causes absenteeism from work.

Challenges Confronting Education for Special Target Groups in Nigeria

Inadequate or Insufficient funding: Despite the government's allocation of a significant portion of the national budget to education, it is not enough to adequately provide for the needs of Nigerian children. It is instructive to note that UNESCO recommends that developing countries should dedicate 15 to 20 per cent of their annual budget to public education. Experts worry that the education budget between 2016 to 2022 indicate that the sector has not received the recommended 15 per cent. Also, the little allocated resources for education are heavily mismanaged and misappropriated, (Ejeh & Shaibu, 2017).

Lack of Government Blue-Print on Sub-Cultural Group Education: Lack of government blue print on sub-cultural group education which could have been fashion out by government. Such a blue-print should take cognizance of the rural life, economic activities and social deprivation. This is necessary because accessibilities have always been a problem of government effort to reach all people due to its awesome financial implication (UNESCO, 2019).

Inadequacy of Professionals (qualified teaching personnels) to Cater for Children with Special Needs: Inadequate manpower, as regards insufficiency of qualified teachers or personnels is also one of the several challenges facing Education for Special Target groups in Nigeria. This means that those teachers specially trained to impart knowledge to the learners are not sufficiently available to carry out their teaching duties in the special need schools. Special education teachers, psychologists, physiotherapists, social workers, nurses, doctors, vocational instructors etc are not really employed directly to take care of educational, motor, social, psychological, vocational needs of persons with disabilities (Isaac, 2022).

There is no well-developed Curriculum by the Government for the Education of the Prisoners: It has been noticed that most of the education given to the inmates are usually sponsored by the Non-Governmental Agencies (NGOs) like the Joy Bringer Foundations (JBF) in Ikoyi Prison, Lagos (Ejeh & Shaibu, 2017).

Poor Recognition of Schools in Remote Location as in Sub-Cultural Groups: Schools located far away in the rural areas usually suffer in terms of structures, facilities, teaching staff among others which serve as a major challenge to sub-cultural groups. The primitive attitude and unwillingness of the people to embrace education, as most sub-cultural people preferred that their wards work on the family farms than spending the season elsewhere (Ejeh & Shaibu, 2017).

Insufficient Special Schools to Cater for the Need of Children of Special Target Groups: For instance, Nomads children such as pastoralist children, migrant fishermen's children, migrant farmers, prisoners' sub-cultural groups among others are not sufficiently provided for by the government (Ejeh & Shaibu, 2017).

Lack of Organized Structured/facilities for inmates Education: These structures/facilities for inmates include buildings, instructional materials, textbooks and writing materials which aid learning in the school (Ejeh & Shaibu, 2017).

Conclusion

Education sector in Nigeria needs to be prioritize in order to increase the literacy of children and adults in Nigeria. The illiteracy level of Nigerians can be curbed and literacy boasted with Education for Special Target Groups in Nigeria since it is an aspect of inclusive education with components to promote Sub-cultural groups, Adult Education, Women Education, Nomadic Education and others. Failure to curb illiteracy level among Nigerians will have consequential effects as poverty, poor health and general economic and political disaster.

Recommendations

Education for special target groups can be a sure path to curbing illiteracy in Nigeria, if the following recommendations are implemented.

Firstly, Adequate funding by the government and other relevant stakeholders will go a long way to promote Education for Special Target Groups as regards curbing illiteracy in Nigeria. If this is done, the programme will fulfill and accomplish its targeted aim, goals and objectives at the long run.

Secondly, sensitizing and publicizing Education for Special Target Groups among the people is another crucial thing to be done. If this programme is well embraced after proper awareness, publicity and aggressive sensitization to the populace, it will consequently curb illiteracy and encourage literacy.

Thirdly, recruitment, timely training and retraining of qualified education for Special Target Groups teachers in order to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of the personnels and the programme by the Government, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders.

Lastly, government should endeavour to pay stipends to illiterates and their parents who are willing to go to school in order to encourage enrollment in schools which will reduce the level of illiteracy among the populace.

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