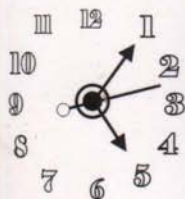




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Existentialist Perspective of Literacy Promotional Campaigns

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Abstract

Advances have been made in the formal educational system with the incursion of the private sector. Despite this progress, adult literacy which is driven mostly by the non-formal sector still needs more promotional efforts by individuals and groups instead of relying on government efforts and development partner activities. This paper argues that to start from the premise that everybody knows is not only a fallacy but also an undermining factor for all literacy promotional campaigns.

Keywords: Literacy, adult literacy, promotional campaigns, learning society

Introduction

The nature of humans as insatiable beings and the ever growing advancements in society call for literacy, which entails competencies needed to compete in the world. While the ability to read, write and count are basic to all, other levels of literacy demand that those who will be relevant in the society need to develop further abilities. Societies both in the developed and developing countries will always need to ensure that their citizens are literate. Literate societies can be achieved by

continuous learning through what has been referred to as learning societies.

The creation of a learning society through Education for All programmes remains constant, but the targets for its achievement have changed from year 2000 to 2015 and now to 2030. It would not cost the world organisations much money or efforts to shift the target from 2030 to another fifteen years. There is an assumption that everybody knows the value of literacy but the facts show that not everybody really knows. It depends on the fact that knowledge imposes on the knower the power of action in achieving a conviction. Instead of the focus on government and so-called development partners, promotional efforts of literacy if they are to be sustainable and authentic ought to be focused more on personal efforts of all its adherents rather than dependence on external agencies.

Literacy Campaigns

Campaigns refer to a series of operations intended to achieve a goal in a particular area. A campaign has some religious, military, political, business, and sporting connotations. This means it has fighting, rallying, advertising, and competing implications. The use of campaigns in all the above contexts, to mobilise people and resources on a large scale in order to achieve ambitious objectives within a limited period of time is a long established practice (Hanemann, 2014).

In the history of literacy campaigns, there has been emphasis on the analogy and development of religious campaigns. It is true that religious organisations were the ones that started educational efforts in most countries. Braimoh (1990) traced literacy campaigns to the reformation whereby Protestantism broke from the Catholic Church.

The aggressive method employed by Pentecostalism is instructive for literacy campaigners, rather than the orthodox method of the first generation churches, from which EACH-ONE-TEACH-ONE can be linked to Pentecostal Christianity canvass for crusades and rallies. They also use follow up methods to keep their converts in the fold. Such methods should

be emulated by literacy experts who are serious with achieving effective promotional campaigns.

Apart from the religious type campaign, another campaign type that can be used to improve literacy campaigns is the military type of campaign: at strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Each level is concerned with planning (making strategy), which involves analysing the situation, estimating friendly and enemy capabilities and limitations, and devising possible courses of action. Corresponding to the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war and conflict are national (grand) strategy with its national military strategy subcomponent, operational strategy, and battlefield strategy. (Maxwell, 1997). This means that at the strategic level, a literacy campaign should focus on defining and supporting national policy and relate same to the outcome expected of literacy campaigns.

There is also the political campaign. The way politicians conduct their campaigns to make people attend can also be instructive. Within the political campaign is the trade union campaign from the Marxist school of thought that the masses must mobilise to overthrow structures of governments that are oppressive and pervasive. The history of working class campaigns in Nigeria is linked with the history of trade unionism and workers' struggle for better conditions; and a more favourable reward system on one hand, and self determination of most countries in Africa.

Business campaigns in the forms of advertisements for products are also very effective. The entertainment industry has taken the lead in this campaign method and it is worthy of note to single out sports promotion.

The use of social media would be effective if anecdotes, axioms and wise sayings are published for the consumption of the elite so that they can move more forcefully to ensure that education for all is achieved in the shortest and nearest future.

The Problem with Campaign Strategies

Literacy campaigns have failed in African countries because of the lack of consultation with the people to know their felt needs.

David (2001) accounted for the failure of literacy campaigns in Zimbabwe 'that it was evident that the Zimbabwean campaign was launched without prior consultation with the supposed beneficiaries'. Needs analysis, planning, publicity and evaluation proved inadequate, and the objectives for the campaigns were not agreed upon between the organizers, the educators and the learners. It was concluded that 'the top-down approach used in planning the campaign in Zimbabwe therefore caused problems because the authorities did not know what the people wanted'.

Bhola (1997) criticised literacy campaigns as too often run without preparation and too brief to make any real change in the lives of communities without follow-up for further education or for transition to work, and ephemeral, with no institutional effort. Hanemann (2014) said most large scale campaigns have set overtly ambitious targets and underestimated the complexity of the task.

Institutional Campaigns for Literacy

The Federal Government of Nigeria launched a ten-year national mass literacy campaign in 1982 to get rid of high level of illiteracy which Omolewa and Akinde (1982) quoted in Braimoh (1990) put at about 70%. Braimoh (1990) said that the literacy campaign failed because there was lack of efficient co-ordination among all the agencies involved in the campaign.

In other parts of Africa like Egypt, the achievements of literacy campaigns are laudable. Sywelem (2015) mentioned associations that have helped Egypt. They include the General Association for Literacy and Adult Education (GALAE), Caaritas Egypt Adult Literacy Program and the Arab Network for Literacy and Adult Education (ANLAE). These associations have been identified as success stories of literacy education in Egypt.

Given the massive usage of information technology driven by the computer, media products, clothes, and automobiles are highly promoted by these media but the opposite is true for literacy. The wave of marketing supported by the social media

is highly commendable, especially in business and politics. Since governments build institutions and are the greatest drivers of a country's economy and politics, it is high time that literacy campaigns take prime positions in the government's developmental plans by ensuring that political parties and business organisations make literacy a key aspect of their awareness creation programmes.

Existentialist Perspective

Existentialism rejects all abstract thinking, but favours the method of philosophy connected with individual's experience and historical situations (Omoregie, 1994). As against classical ideas of rationality as the essence of humans, Mozaffari and Jahanian (2016) highlight three fundamental concepts in existentialism as freedom, responsibility and authenticity. These concepts are useful in literacy campaigns. It should be the motive of those promoting literacy to imbue freedom in the minds of their clientele. Paulo Freire captured this attribute in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where he condemned banking education and supported knowledge that can truly emancipate the people. Responsibility is another hallmark of an educated and literate person because the individual should be accountable for language used, attitudes expressed and actions shown at all times. Authenticity goes back to what Heidegger calls the call of the being in self actualization and fulfillment. This has the cultural implication of promoting literacy using indigenous languages and traditional forms of knowledge that the people can easily decode and encode as the case may be.

Instead of relying on institutional campaigns, individuals should be committed to canvassing for literacy by sharing their experiences of its value and relating it to the needs of intending clients. This was why Sjoarinejad (2012) believed that attention should be given to individuals so that they can bring them to realize their true value and benefit from the freedom to personally decide and be responsible for their quality of life.

Conclusion

The arguments have always been that literacy is a public good instead of being private. This is true to a large extent because the society stands to gain a lot from a literate citizenry. However, this argument is no longer tenable in a knowledge driven economy where capitalist commercialization and exclusive privatisation are the order of the day. Although literacy has both private and public good, everyone ought to be concerned about its promotional campaigns. From the existentialist perspective, literacy promotional campaigns should be taken over by individual persons who have the highest stake in its success. These are professionals and those in training for its expansion.

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