

LASU JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES

Vol. 4



# OPANBATA

JONÀ IMÒ AFIRIKÀ



LASU JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES

VOL. 4

# ÒPÁÑBÀTÀ

JỌNÀ ÌMỌ ÁFÍRÍKÀ

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*A Publication of*  
Department of African Languages, Literatures and  
Communication Arts, Lagos State University, Ojo.

ISSN: 1118 - 1311

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**(LASU Journal of African Studies)**

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OLAYINKA ABIMBOLA EGBOKHARE\*

THE BAPTIST EXAMPLE OF SOCIAL  
RESPONSIBILITY: AN APPRAISAL OF THE LITERACY  
PROGRAMME OF THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST  
CONVENTION

**Abstract**

This paper is an appraisal of the social responsibility purpose served by the Adult literacy programme of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. The research objectives was to find out the strategies, the successes and challenges faced on the programme, The researcher sought to know how this has improved the literacy level of the participants and the extent to which the church members have benefitted from the project. The paper examines how the programme runs, the perception of the beneficiaries and that of the organizers. Data was collected through in depth interview from a purposive sample drawn from among the programme director, the teachers and the students. The researcher also gathered data by observing the actual classroom situation. The centres visited were in Ibadan. Findings show that there were more females than males involved in the programme both as teachers and students. Yoruba language played a pivotal role as the language of instruction. The instructors who are mostly volunteers earn very little and in most cases, no

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stipend. Some of the major challenges faced are lack of resources, teacher and student mobility and low motivation.

### **Introduction**

When Mrs. Adebayo asked Mrs. Owotunde why she did not attend the Women's Fellowship Bible Study, she never anticipated the answer she received. To her shock, Mrs. Owotunde whispered conspiratorially,

I cannot read or write. Every time I come, I sit and watch all of you speak English, when you stand, I stand and I do whatever every other person is doing. In fact, I am thinking seriously about finding another church preferably where they speak Yoruba, at least, if I cannot speak, I can listen and understand.

It may not be far from the truth to say that a sizeable number of Nigerians faithfully attend church services every Sunday without ever fully participating in the worship experience. Like Mrs. Owotunde, they are mere benchwarmers, who follow the worship lead given by the educated members of the congregation. Many of them have over time committed to memory the popular hymns, and when the not so popular hymns are sung, they simply hum along, remain silent or form unintelligible sounds that appear to correspond with the lyrics of the song.

Over time, the Nigerian Baptist Convention has seen the need to educate its illiterate members as a social responsibility. The Nigerian Baptist convention has over eight thousand churches and has since her inception in the 18<sup>th</sup> century impacted on the lives of Nigerians in the areas of health, education and community development. The Baptist convention has schools from

Primary to University level, hospitals and other service-based institutions. Whereas Christian missionaries introduced western education and literacy to the southern parts of the country in 1842, the literacy class had existed since the first Baptist Missionaries came to Nigeria. However, the Baptist convention formally organized and inaugurated the literacy programme in 1960. The unit was first headed by Dr. A.H. Dyson, and the first Nigerian Director was Dr. K.O. Anifowose. In 1998, the name of the department was changed to Social Ministries Department with Adult Education and other divisions like Prison Ministries and Social concern. The name of the division was changed from Adult Education to Literacy division to fully integrate young learners who are not adults into the programme. (*Adult Literacy Education Handbook for Nigerian Baptist Convention Churches* 1968:5)

The division set up three types of Literacy programmes which are:

- a) Basic Literacy: organized for beginners; coming to the learning environment for the first time, they learn the "three R's" *Writing, Reading and Rithmetics*.
- b) Post basic: meant for those who are willing to go higher than just learning to read and write but to obtain one certificate or the other.
- c) Functional Literacy: Designed to help the people in their everyday life. This form of literacy is for the development of one and the society.

According to UNESCO (2006:28), literacy refers to a context-bound continuum of reading and writing, acquired and developed through processes of learning and application in schools and in other settings appropriate to youth and adults. Literacy is indispensable; hence whether basic, post basic or functional; the Literacy programme of the Nigerian Baptist convention is geared towards enabling young people and adults to

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partake better in societal activities. Unlike Mrs. Owotunde who was introduced at the beginning of this paper, such people will become active participants in whatever their church does. The Nairobi Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education in 1976 which was further developed in the Hamburg Declaration of 1997 defines adult education as

The entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise whereby people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge and improve their technical or professional qualification or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society.

(Adult Education and Development, 2010:10)

Leaders of the Nigerian Baptist Convention see literacy as the magic wand that can enable them to empower their members with technology and commercial power. While some people see education as a luxury, UNESCO promotes literacy as a basic human right. As part of its strategies, UNESCO includes the achievement in literacy varied with the political will, financial resources and various development or economic growth models in its assessment of member countries. In essence, UNESCO holds every participating country responsible for their country's overall literacy performance or level (Limage, 2007). While reiterating this view, Malik (2011) says education is the basic human right and quintessential pre-requisite for social capital formation, social and economic empowerment. Scholars believe that if Africa can solve its illiteracy problem, it will be addressing many important issues in the process. To them, there is a close relationship between illiteracy and poverty. In fact, they hold the view that those with the lowest level of skills, particularly in relation to literacy and



numeracy, are likely to be the poorest people. Kigoni (2011: 24), while quoting Joseph Stiglitz, past president of World Bank and Globalization Researcher, observes that

What separates developed from less developed countries is not a gap in resources but a gap in knowledge, which is why investments in education and technology are so important.

The problem of Africa, they say, is not a problem of availability or allocation of resource, "the two greatest needs of sub-Saharan Africa are not food and water but knowledge and capital" (Kigoni, 2011:26). The need for education is crucial, and literacy is a major factor in issues dealing with development and poverty alleviation. Learners are taught to read and write, and they are introduced to basic knowledge of Mathematics. The Baptist Literacy programme is geared towards enabling learners to interact with their environment so that they can search for information essential for living.

In recent times, social concerns are no longer the sole responsibility of business corporations, Churches are becoming such big institutions in Nigeria that some people are beginning to ask if it will not be necessary to start asking them to pay taxes. If consumers can withhold their support from any company that is not sensitive to the needs of the public, can one imagine what will happen to worshippers who in protest boycott places of worship? Seitel (1992: 117) opines that "to aid youth and adult education by cooperating with administrators and teachers in providing student vocational guidance is a laudable project." To him, churches should aid society since churches cannot operate outside the society and are so dependent on the contribution of their congregation. In agreement, Cutlip, Centre and Broom (2000:464) express the view that the domain of Corporate Social

Responsibility (CSR) has moved from the activities of business corporations because

Churches and universities began scrutinizing their investment portfolios, selling holdings in companies that might conflict with public and constituency perceptions of corporate insensitivity to social concerns

### **Methodology**

In collecting data for this paper, the researcher employed the survey and observation methods of research. First, a purposive sample was drawn of selected Baptist churches based on the number of years for which they have operated an adult literacy programme, the viability of their literacy programme and the availability of documentation on their adult literacy programme. The sample was drawn from among administrators, teachers and students of the adult literacy programme of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. The instrument used for data gathering was the in-depth interview conducted on site at the various selected churches. The administrative officer in charge of the Adult Literacy Programme was interviewed in his office at the Baptist Building, Oke-Bola, Ibadan (the administrative headquarters of the Baptist convention). The teachers selected for the survey were those who had participated in the Adult Literacy programme for at least ten years and whose churches still run regular adult literacy classes. The researcher visited three of the adult literacy classes in session on two different occasions within two months. This afforded her the opportunity to interact with some of the students and make some observations on the teaching methods and learning environment. Some of the literacy teaching materials of the Baptist Convention were also assessed for content and secondary data.

Using the survey and observation method, the researcher obtained data on how the adult literacy programme of the Nigerian Baptist Convention operates as a social responsibility effort. Three categories of people were interviewed to provide data on how the programme runs and to find out the benefits and the challenges faced by the programme. The line of questioning covered the educational background of the respondents, role in the literacy programme, number of years of involvement in the programme and general perceptions on the project. The researcher interviewed the policy makers represented by the director of the literacy programme, selected teachers who have been active on the literacy programme and present and past students on the programme. The study focused on three research questions which are:

1. To what extent has the programme met its objectives?
2. What factors influence the running of the literacy programme of the Nigerian Baptist Convention?
3. What is the stakeholders' perception of the performance/ achievements of the adult literacy programme of the Nigerian Baptist Convention?

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### **RQ I: To what extent has the programme met its objectives?**

UNESCO's (1978) definition of literacy sees a literate person as one who has acquired the knowledge and skills indispensable to the performance of all activities for which literacy is necessary in order to play an effective part in his group and community and whose achievement in reading, writing and arithmetic are such that they enable him to continue the development as well as effective participation in matters relating to the life of his community. This directly ties into one of the objectives of the literacy programme of the Nigerian Baptist Convention which is to

empower the individual learner to be able to maximally benefit from the society and not be ostracized simply because he cannot read or write. Of relevance is the clause in the UNESCO's definition which says the person should be able to play an effective part in his community. This becomes germane when one considers the fact that being illiterate may exclude an individual from performing some of the obligations conferred on him by virtue of him being a member of a congregation.

Looking at this definition of literacy, one observes that the domain of literacy transcends reading and writing to include being a participatory citizen of a community. The objectives of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in engaging in adult literacy programme tie into the literacy goals of UNESCO. The objectives include the following:

- ❖ Help reduce illiteracy rate within the Baptist churches of Nigeria in particular and other churches or organizations in general.
- ❖ Help the church illiterates acquire enough reading and writing skills (so that they can read and understand the word of God)
- ❖ Help the church illiterates become full church members
- ❖ Help evangelize and develop the weak ones
- ❖ Help them become more useful in the service of the church of God
- ❖ Help them to be more useful to the nation and to help improve their standard of living
- ❖ Carry out the great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ which says; "Go ye therefore and teach all nations..." (Matt.28: 19)
- ❖ Encourage Christian growth through Bible Study in the home.
- ❖ Make the Bible a tool for evangelism –even to the prisoners.
- ❖ Cooperate with the Federal, State and local government and private agencies in the fight against illiteracy

- ❖ Help train volunteer adult literacy teachers who will in turn teach others
- ❖ Develop adult primers and follow-up literature for new readers.

These are lofty objectives, and for more than 40 years, the Nigerian Baptist Convention has through its local churches done its best to achieve them. *The Adult Literacy Education Handbook for Nigerian Baptist Convention Churches* (1968:5) identifies seven virtues of literacy as follows: the ability to read a letter, write a letter, read a receipt, read a figures on a produce scale, a book, a newspaper and a public notice. Additional findings from the interviews shows that the Baptist literacy programme is also targeted at helping illiterate members to read the Bible and participate more in church life by understanding hymns, Sunday School lessons and other church literature. The church believes that a Christian needs knowledge in order to increase in her strength in the word of God. For people who are literate, the mundane tasks of reading a receipt or being able to sign one's own cheque may never be appreciated. For an illiterate, the challenges are mounting daily, and they are visible not only in bank transaction especially now with the use of Automated transfer machine (ATM), but also in the administration of medication on self or others. Though these tasks appear ordinary to the lettered person, they usually lead to trepidation in the average illiterate. The researcher was informed about one of the candidates in the Molete centre, an elderly trader, a Muslim, who joined the literacy class with the sole objective of learning how to write figures and sign her cheque book because her children who assisted her with bank transactions were defrauding her. She told her instructor that she only wished to learn how to write her name, write a signature, write letters and numbers from 1-500, so that she can conduct her bank transactions by herself.

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The Baptist Adult Literacy programme has six classes

1. Basic reading classes (also called beginners classes)
2. English reading classes
3. Adult reading classes
4. Pre- GCE class
5. GCE class
6. Language Study

The objectives of each of the classes vary as the names suggest. Some of the teachers interviewed further explained what is entailed at each level. It was pointed out that the major preoccupation in the basic reading class is to teach learners to interpret letters and figures. Here adult illiterates spend nine months learning to read and write. The training is expected to span nine months at each level, three days a week and two hours per meeting. In most cases however, the classes do not meet this frequently. Meetings are scheduled based on the convenience of the teachers and the students.

The English reading class is meant for the adult learners who probably have learnt to read in their own languages, or others who as a result of relocation cannot speak the language of their present place of abode. Instructors at the Molete Baptist Church centre recounted the story of a man who was transferred to Nigeria from one of the neighbouring West African French speaking countries. His desire was to be able to read, write and understand spoken English. The next level is the adult primary class which is for people who have completed the English syllabus as well as others who may have dropped out of the primary school or those who were unable to take their first school leaving certificate examination. This programme also like the first two spans 9 calendar months and the syllabus used is usually that of the state government since the students are to be registered for a state examination. The researcher encountered some candidates

who enrolled for this level of the programme because their employers required proof of Primary School Leaving certificate to ratify their long held positions or effect their promotion to the next cadre. One of the instructors (who happens to be a teacher in a government owned school) spoke of a candidate who approached her for assistance in securing a fake Primary School Leaving Certificate for her to tender for promotion at the State Civil Service Commission. Hear the instructor,

I told her she stood two major risks if she was discovered to have used a fake result, first she would lose her job, second she would go to jail. I then encouraged her by saying why not sacrifice a little time and acquire literacy skills as well as a certificate you can boast of, she started coming for classes after then.

The Pre-GCE class is for adults who have passed the primary six examinations and wish to enroll for the GCE exam. For the GCE class, only adult learners who have completed the Pre-GCE class, Modern Three or have reached Secondary school form five are admitted. The language study class is for people who wish to communicate in English or other languages apart from the mother tongue. Church members who married across tribes and do not speak the same language as their spouse benefit a lot from the language class. The researcher met a candidate who joined the literacy class because her daughter married a non-Yoruba, and when the candidate visited to help the young couple nurse a baby, everyone in the homestead interacted using the English Language, and the elderly woman felt left out.

Literacy intervention is dynamic, and it goes beyond these six classes. In an interview he granted the researcher in 2008, Dr. K.O. Anifowose, the Director of the Literacy programme of the

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Nigerian Baptist Convention observed that "literacy is not merely teaching others to read and write, it is love in action because believers make out time to share their God given talents". To him, literacy ministry cannot be done without self-dedication, genuine love, compassion for people and sensitivity to the needs of the illiterates in the society. He cited the instance of the prison literacy programme of the Nigerian Baptist Convention which was established as a correctional education programme to meet the social, psychological and spiritual needs of the prison inmates. This example recognizes the provision made in the definition by UNESCO that literacy can take place in any other setting appropriate for the learner, whether young or old.'

When the researcher asked about the procedure for the recruitment of learners, the responses varied from centre to centre to reveal different situations. One of the literacy teachers interviewed disclosed that his local Baptist church is involved in church -planting activities in some villages. When the church members go for this rural evangelism, they offer to teach the villagers and their children to read and write. This way, individuals who are reluctant to come to church are willing to join literacy classes. It was observed that in some cases, some male villagers would grant permission to their wives and children to attend literacy classes but not the church service. One of the instructors at Molete Baptist Church who has been involved in the programme for more than 25 years pointed out in an interview conducted within the church premises on August 16, 2012 that

announcements are made in the church, the members of the Men and Women's Missionary Union (MMU and WMU) are enjoined to tell their neighbours, co-workers ,family and friends to come and learn because it is free. We always tell them testimonies of people that this literacy programme



has helped. We also assure them that our literacy certificate is recognized by the government and we have a cordial relationship with the Adult Education Department of University of Ibadan

Another teacher interviewed at the University of Ibadan Baptist Church said most of the adult learners in his class were domestic servants or elderly parents of church members who have come to visit with their children. The researcher found out that in some other instances, the churches use the platform of the annual "Literacy Sunday" programme to create awareness among church members about the literacy classes services that produced those that are promoted during the Literacy Sunday celebration. At this service, students who just completed the literacy programme are given certificates of recognition. In some other instances, notices are placed in the church bulletin so that literate church members who have wards, neighbors and acquaintances who are illiterate can invite them.

In another thriving literacy centre, in Lighthouse Baptist Church, Akobo, Ibadan, the recruitment is closely tied to evangelism. Therefore, when the church goes out to preach, the members often tell the new converts who are illiterate of the existing opportunity to learn to read and write. This church has a far-reaching soul winning ministry plan. They have about 40 centres in Ohori Mission Fields. These centres are located between Nigeria and Republic of Benin.

The people here are Aworis or Eguns. We teach them how to read and write. The centres are not meant for Baptist members but for anyone willing to know how to read and write.

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Apart from this Foreign Mission, Lighthouse Baptist Church has a thriving Literacy Programme in its Akobo location. According to Mrs. Rebecca Adenrele,

two of the current learners are women in Purdah (veiled Muslim women). Some of the learners got to know through word-of-mouth communication. Some of them live near the church, they got to know about the literacy class and they told others. We tell them we don't charge fees, we supply books, all you have to bring is yourself.

The content analysis supports findings from the interviews about the language of instruction. The more commonly used language of instruction is Yoruba followed by English. Although the teachers informed the interviewer that in other parts of the country, other languages like Hausa or Igbo may be used. The materials for teaching are written primarily in English and six Nigerian Languages. There are about 30 different literacy publications. These are used alongside the materials approved in each state for the examinations for which the adult learners are being prepared. One of the teacher interviewed pointed out that the 9 months duration of training is not mandatory. He pointed out that in the past he had encountered students who mastered the literacy material in less than the stipulated 9 months. The materials available for the adult teacher include *English Made Easy*, *Mr. And Mrs. Dikko Learn to Read*, the *Ladder to Literacy* series as well as materials in indigenous languages like Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Urhobo, Tiv, Idoma. One of the materials in Yoruba is *Iwe Kika ati Isiro fun Alakobere*, which is one of the publications of the National Commission For Mass Literacy. Other materials include *Iwe Kika Yoruba fun awon Akeeko Agbelekawe* (produced by UNICEF). The teachers are encouraged to use flash cards,

stories, songs and any other available teaching aids that will make learning pleasurable for the adult learner. The researcher found out that at the most basic level, learners are taught to read and write. The focus like the teachers reiterated is on reading, writing and arithmetic. Other subjects are integrated after the teacher has ascertained that students can read well in English and Yoruba. When the researcher asked why the emphasis is on the use of Yoruba as a language of instruction, Mrs Adenrele pointed out that the learning foundation is always on the mother tongue,

they must know the mother tongue very well from the alphabets: the big letters and then the small letters Aa Bb Dd Ee and so on. We do a lot of re-teaching, depending on the type of learner we have. There are three major groups; people who have never been to school before, school drop-outs and people who have attempted and failed school certificate examination. We may use English if the learner already has some background knowledge.

At the Molete Baptist Church centre, Prince S.O. Odeleye pointed out that the language of instruction may as well be Igbo or Hausa and not only English and Yoruba, the choice depends on the need of the learner.

To round off this section on the extent to which the programme has met its objectives, the researcher inquired about what the Centre sees as its major achievements. One major fallout from the literacy classes in Oyo West Baptist Convention was the establishment of two preaching stations as a result of literacy efforts in this zone. It was also reported that some of the Literacy Centres presented candidates for Primary six examinations and result shows that 99% of the candidates presented were successful, some results are still outstanding.

In addition, the Adult Education Department of the University of Ibadan on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2004 gave an award of excellence to the Literacy programme of the Baptist Convention. The division was among the 8 national and International organizations recognized for their contribution to Mass Literacy both in Nigeria and the World.

Further still on the accomplishment of the group, Mr. Adeyemo of the Literacy unit in a report presented to the advisory board of the Christian Education Department of the Baptist convention at a meeting held in Ibadan on October 12, 2010 had this list of accomplishments to share:

- Reduction of illiteracy rate among the Baptist in particular and Nigeria in general. As a result of this, the Federal Government in 2003 gave the Convention an award for being a leading NGO fighting against illiteracy.
- Many souls have been won to Christ as a result of literacy ministry.
- There are over 3,000 literacy centres all over the Convention.
- More than 50,000 volunteered Literacy facilitators have been trained.
- Many Literacy Primers and follow-up literatures have been produced.

In view of these reports, one may conveniently proclaim that the objectives of setting up the literacy programme are being met gradually and the results are visible. More importantly, the church is empowering its members and reaching out to others who are in need of literacy skills.

## **RQ II: What factors influence the running of the literacy programme of the Nigerian Baptist Convention?**

The researcher tried to establish how the literacy programme runs by asking questions on how teachers are recruited, how teachers

are remunerated, how students are rewarded, what type of relationship exists between teachers and students as well as challenges faced during the course of running the programme. The findings are presented as follows.

The researcher began by inquiring about the mode of recruitment of teachers for the literacy programme. The officer in charge of the Adult Literacy programme of the Nigerian Baptist Convention disclosed that recruitment is strictly by volunteerism. This is hinged on the principle of one of the founding fathers of the Baptist Literacy Programme in person of Late Prof Lamback who made popular the policy of "each one, teach one". Like Evangelist Adeniran, one of the literacy teachers interviewed said, "It is part of our religious responsibility to serve others." This viewpoint is emphasized in the UNESCO goal of education for all by year 2015.

If there are still 2 billion people in the world who cannot read then non- formal education will be pivotal to the achievement of the EFA goal and everyone who can read and write will have to see education for all as the responsibility of all.

The UNESCO goal points at the fact that literacy education is not the duty of teachers alone. Everyone who can read is expected to be able to teach someone else to read. However, experience from the field shows that the practice is still that teachers alone are saddled with the task of literacy even at the volunteer level. Findings from this study shows that 90% the literacy teachers in this study are teachers by profession although only about 10% had any prior adult Education training. Three of the instructors are graduates of the Adult Education programme of the University of Ibadan. Many of the instructors are teachers at the Secondary level. Many of them confessed that it took them a

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while to learn how to teach adult learners and they struggled with being firm and correcting these adults especially because of the age difference.

The researcher wanted to know how the instructors came to be involved in the literacy programme. One of the instructors interviewed said he got interested in the programme when he frequently found himself sitting close to church members who could not read their Bibles or sing from the hymn books. Another volunteer teacher said she joined the literacy team during a Literacy Promotion programme in church when the literacy needs were analysed and a call was made for people who were not engaged in any other service in the church to sign up and help to teach. Being a teacher by profession, she thought it would be an easy call. She said her first shocker was discovering that teaching in a secondary school was totally different from teaching adult learners.

In addition, the researcher also found out from the interviews, that the minimum requirement for teachers that would teach students at levels higher than the beginner class is Junior Secondary School Certificate. Whatever the entry qualification, periodically, the teachers are taken through an annual training or refresher course at the national or convention level. At the conference or state level, other trainings may still take place periodically. Every year, a National Literacy Conference holds and papers are represented. Some of the themes adopted in the past years are: Teaching and Witnessing, Teaching the World the WORD through the word (Literacy), Transformation: changing and empowering lives through literacy. Talking on the organogram of the adult literacy programme, Mr. Adeyemo, of the Adult Literacy Department of the Nigerian Baptist Convention pointed out that the convention has 26 conferences and each conference is made up of a group of associations. These associations in turn have

several local churches under them. The adult literacy programme takes place under each local church. Each literacy class is handled by a volunteer facilitator who may occasionally receive a token for his efforts. In Molete Baptist Church Literacy Centre, the volunteer teachers get #500 per month. In some of the other churches visited, teachers receive no remuneration at all. The number of students in each class is expected to be between 6 and 10 at the most. However, in a particular instance, an instructor disclosed in an interview that she had only one student in her class for 2 years.

When the researcher asked from the interviewees what the mode of reward for the adult learners was. Findings show that the Nigeria Baptist Convention Literacy has put in place different programmes to acknowledge the progress recorded by the adult learners. Periodically, upon successful completion of a specified text, the learner may be given a Red seal/star for completing *The Story of Jesus I*, Blue seal/star for *The Story of Jesus II*, Gold seal/star for *The Story of Jesus III*. Every year, often in March, the church holds a recognition service for the adult learners and at the completion of each stage they are given certificates.

The researcher was informed during the interview that the certificate awarded to the participants is tenable for employment and promotion in the Oyo State Civil service and the private sector. Examples were given of individuals who had used the Literacy Certificate to secure jobs in Lead City University, Union Bank, some privately owned Nursery and Primary Schools among others.

The reward for most of the learners is psychological and not quantifiable. They gain self confidence and a ladder to a transformed life. Like Mrs Adenrele said, "one of our literacy graduates who came here as an illiterate, who could not read or write and had never been to a formal school before is now a

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nursery school teacher. In another instance, a woman's marriage was threatened because of her illiterate status. Her husband complained that she was being cheated in her transactions in the market and this was creating a lot of tension for her at home. Within a short period, she had learnt to read and write and keep track of her purchases". Another instructor mentioned the case of a 60 year old learner whose objective was to be able to read her Bible. She mentioned that it was a great delight to watch the woman read her Bible aloud for the first time in her life instead of having someone read to her. An adult learner who spoke in Yoruba expressed this view, "mo fójú nípa tí iwé, Baba má jẹ kí n fójú nípa tí ẹmí, ẹnikẹni tí kò le kàwé, afójú ni." (I am blind as far as book knowledge is concerned, God will not let me be spiritually blind too, anyone who cannot read is blind.)

Education is the basic human right and quintessential prerequisite for social capital formation, social and economic empowerment. (Belete, 2011:145)

One of the instructors talked about someone who drank the contents of a coke bottle because she could not read the label which boldly said POISON! When learners are taught basic knowledge about agriculture, environment, health, democracy and other related development concepts, they become more socially responsible. Instead, when there is an epidemic or a crisis, they will be able to read instructions about evacuation, prevention or quick response. Simply being able to follow where an arrow points can make a difference between choosing life and death.

There is no doubting the fact that many people benefit from the Literacy programme of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. It is notable that many of the beneficiaries of this literacy scheme are not Baptists and in several instances not even Christians. In addition, the literacy department provides free consultancy services to other denominations and the ministry has facilitated



the establishment of Vocational Training Centres in a few places. However, according to Prince S. O. Odeleye, "in a good year, the number of graduates can be between 75 and 100 in a centre but when the enrolment is low, the figure may be between 30 and 35 participants."

The researcher sought to find out from the instructors what problems are encountered in the adult literacy programme; the responses were as follows,

1. Lack of committed teachers
2. Poverty
3. Wrong timing
4. Poor teacher training
5. Mobility of teachers and students
6. Inappropriate materials
7. Inadequate visual aids
8. Religious factor
9. Inconvenient teaching environment
10. Lack of interest by some of the leaders/Pastors in some churches
11. Unemployment
12. Technological advancement
13. Lack of trained Literacy officers at the Conference and Associational levels
14. Timidity and shame on the part of some learners who do not wish to make their illiteracy public
15. Inconsistency and lack of commitment from Student

The factors listed above were not given in any particular order or frequency, the interviewees were of the opinion that these are the most prevalent set backs to the challenge of delivering qualitative services in adult literacy to members of their individual centres. While speaking on this, one of the interviewees said another problem they encounter is lack of continuity and sustainability. He observed that, "The rate of drop out is high especially in situations where the students are domestic assistants

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of church members or grandparents who came on a visit to help nurse babies or for hospital visits or other short stays". The teachers observed that in learning centre in small churches or preaching station located outside towns and cities, poverty becomes an issue as they have recorded cases where some students cannot afford the few training materials. One of the interviewees observed, "although in some churches, the materials are provided on loan and passed on from class to class. There were other instances where the teacher and the students stayed away because they could not afford the transport fare to the lecture venue". The Baptist convention church planting guideline would have taken care of this problem because there are Baptist churches within walking distance in most localities. However, chances are that where there are churches nearby, there may not be a functional literacy class.

On the issue of the materials used sometimes not being appropriate for the literacy need of the learners. Sometimes this may be as a result of the teacher's inadequacy and lack of training. The teacher is expected to be able to assess the literacy level and need of the student and suggest material that will be adequate to cater for the learners' need. The material may either be higher than the reader's level or too easy for the reader. An experienced teacher will be more flexible and creative in catering to literacy situation or demand on hand. For instance, one of the teachers interviewed told the researcher that

You have to be flexible as a teacher because some of the students cannot cope. Yes, it is true we have a curriculum but we take the Learners' age and ability into consideration. We don't follow the curriculum blindly.

Religion is another factor which constitutes a restraint. This can happen through many ways. One is when an adult learner who has been making notable improvements feels pressured by possibilities of being forced to convert. The researcher observed that in the centres visited, there was no aggression shown towards learners who were not of the faith. Like one of the teachers put it, "we don't struggle to get them to become believers, some of the books we use, like *The Story of Jesus*, get them to start asking questions. The researcher however observed that individual learners may on their own read and discover that they accept the truth of the gospel or be drawn into the faith by the lifestyle of the teachers who are usually very warm, friendly and encouraging. The researcher wondered if any of the students felt obliged to convert to Christianity or specifically the Baptist faith simply because they benefitted from the programme. One of the instructors interviewed affirmed that they have indeed recorded such cases. But like one other teachers said, "we are not forcing them to change their faith, we want them to be brought out of darkness. If they can read, they will search for answer for themselves."

The researcher asked how the teachers handle cases where a parent or spouse stops his child or partner from coming for lessons. One of the teachers interviewed at the Molete centre responded thus

When we have a parent asking a child to stop coming because of the fear of conversion, we try to reach out to the parents through interpersonal means. However, we have had a case where a Muslim father withdrew his twin daughters out of fear that they would convert to Christianity or be indoctrinated. Unfortunately, these girls had made so much progress and we were already discussing

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registering them for WASCE Ordinary Level as special candidates.”

In another instance, two learners who were in Purdah had challenges attending lessons because they had to get back home at a particular hour to be able to cook dinner for breaking of fast during Ramadan, their teacher had to reschedule the class to suit the learners because as she said

During Ramadan, we close early so that they can go home to cook. We don't want to break their homes and we want them to keep coming back to learn.

On the issue of wrong timing, the teachers always need to accommodate the vocation of the learners. In one of the centres visited, the classes were held on Sunday morning during the Sunday school hour. This is because most of the learners were domestic maids who were only free to attend lessons when their employers also had programmes to attend in the church. Another challenge in some centres is lack of a regular meeting place and lack of comfortable furniture for learning. Some of the centres did not have classroom settings, there were no tables to write, Learners sat on benches, and writing was difficult if not in some cases impossible. The venue in some centres shifts from week to week depending on what other important programmes or meetings are vying for the same space. However, one of the teacher's interviewed was quick to point out to the researcher that some of the conditions of learning were not worse than what was obtainable in Government owned schools. More importantly, he noted that majority of the students were more interested in the learning goal than the learning environment.

Another major challenge was identified by a contributor at one of the trainings organized for the teachers, "some of the centres are totally devoid of the learners for which they are established". Where learners are found, low enrolment, poor attendance as well as high drop -out rate are common features of the classes. In an earlier cited instance where a facilitator taught only one student for two years, one can only imagine the commitment of such a teacher. The teachers are so committed that they do not take absenteeism for granted. The researcher gathered from the interviews that sometimes the coordinators call students who have absconded to ask why they have stopped coming and encourage them to still make an effort to come. This points at one of the peculiar features of the Literacy programme: the teachers are resilient and dedicated. In one of the centres visited, the teachers came right on time and they (along with the researcher) had to wait for over thirty minutes before some the students arrived. Another lecturer pointed out that some students may be absent 3 out of 4 meeting times in a month. This can be frustrating for a teacher and learning will definitely be slow for such irregular students.

There is nothing new or strange about the challenges identified by instructors because they re-echo some of the existing arguments raised against supporting adult learning and literacy in developing countries. The concerns usually include the lack of teachers, the poor quality of provision, a lack of literate environment and high drop-out rate. One of the interviewees pointed out that Government intervention would go a long way to make the efforts of individuals, NGO'S and Religious organisations to yield results. He however lamented that "unfortunately, government intervention in literacy is highly politicized. There is more talk than action." This should ideally not be the case as an analysis of the Millennium Development Goals

suggests that most development agendas should have adult learning woven into them before any nation can claim to making headways in its quest for sustainable development.

**RQ III: What is the stakeholders' perception about the performance/achievements of the adult literacy programme of the Nigerian Baptist Convention?**

The gloomy features associated painted by the challenges faced in the literacy programme notwithstanding, the adult literacy programme is seen by all stakeholders as a successful venture in corporate social responsibility for several reasons. They observe that the gains accrue to the church, the learner, the teacher and the society at large. Although every Baptist church, (all 8,000 of them) is expected to run literacy programmes, not all of them have functional literacy classes. Those that have literacy programmes will not end up with worshippers like Mrs. Owotunde who was alluded to in the introduction of this study who attends church regularly but feels left out of the activities. The churches end up with members who can take active parts in whatever their churches are engaged in. They participate better in church life; they read their Bible, function in the choir, teach Bible study classes and contribute in church council meetings because the Baptist church runs a democratic system. In many instances, membership increases because often times, people have joined the church just from being members or graduates of the literacy classes. This was recapped by the Administrator in charge of Literacy at the National Headquarters of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in Ibadan who said in an interview that;

The church stands to gain new converts because the literacy programme is used as an avenue to evangelize. It also has a long term benefit to the

church... the pastor can take time off to rest since he can now delegate some tasks to others.”

Further on what the church stands to gain, one of the interviewees observed that the churches get dedicated and empowered members who become better spouses, better parents, responsible adults and better citizens of the country. He said from his over 20 years of experience as a literacy teacher in his local church, he has watched people become more refined as they improved on their literacy skills. He mentioned that he had seen stark illiterates become “alakowe” (which is Yoruba for learned). By this he meant that many of them choose to do things in ways that suggest that they are people of books or letters, in other words- refined people.

Majority of the literacy students are only too happy to be able to sign their names instead of thumb- printing documents. According to one of the teachers interviewed, “one needs to see the expression of joy, freedom and liberation that these students express when they can eventually write their own names or decipher words written on paper.” Many are encouraged to sit for the primary 6 examination. In fact, some literacy teachers who were interviewed said 95% of the candidates that were put up for the Primary 6 examination were successful. In one outstanding record, one of the graduands of the Baptist literacy class went on to acquire a Ph. D in Adult Education. Apart from the education they get, some of the learners become economically more buoyant especially when the literacy programme incorporates the functional components.

The Baptist Literacy programme is structured in a way that the educational focus is on the necessity of developing and updating competencies for the resolution of problems. The programme also emphasizes the development of capacity for

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involvement in livelihood issues such as health, nutrition, hygiene and income generating activities. Like Belete (2011:67-68) says

Vocational educators are aware that without sufficient mastery of literacy and numeracy, learners can only take limited advantage of possibilities to enhance their skills and capacities.

This came to the fore as the researcher encountered some illiterate apprentices who came because they had a need to learn to read and write, for instance there were two fashion designers who wanted to learn to be able to write down the measurements of their clients. Thus, with a good foundation in the three R'S, the learners will be better equipped to tackle the hurdles of vocational learning as they come. For many of the instructors interviewed, the benefits of attending literacy programme should not only include the ability to read and write but also the capability to participate in meetings, improve trading, buying and calculation, make useful contributions to general discussions and get the best out of one's environment. This is why instructors are informed that literacy should emphasize participatory learning processes to strengthen various life skills.

Findings from the interview show testimonies of school drop outs and stark illiterates who have used the Baptist Literacy programme as a platform to write examinations and acquire much needed certificates. In one of the centres visited, the researcher came upon another angle to the Baptist Adult Literacy programme. In Molete Baptist Church Centre, there were young learners who are still in school but were enrolled in the literacy class because they needed help that they could not get from their teachers in school. One of the instructors had this to say,

You know some children are slow learners, some are brilliant but playful and they lack focus.



Unfortunately, the public school classrooms are crowded and teachers are few. The ratio of teacher to student is so high that any child who cannot easily understand is left to suffer. Here, we have helped slow learners, hyperactive children and poor readers. We give them the attention they need but which they cannot get from their school teachers. They leave here better, with results and greater confidence and ability.

In essence, some of these centres also function as remedial centres or After School Lesson for students with reading and learning disabilities. This will be of great community service to young members of the congregation especially because most schools do not have programmes or plans in place for deficient readers or learners.

To buttress the point on the diversity of the approaches to Literacy Intervention, Adeleye (2000) in a study conducted on the adult literacy programme of the Baptist convention among prisoners reported that the discharged prisoners found it easy to integrate into the society without fear. This he said was as a result of the skills acquired through the functional literacy programme of the Nigeria Baptist convention.

This present study found out from the stakeholders interviewed that to the Baptist church, the literacy programme is seen more as a means of giving back to the public than as a tool of evangelism. The instructors maintain that literacy on its own can be a tool for evangelism. For instance, the aim of the literacy programme in the prison is basically to improve the lot of the prisoners and empower them for life upon the completion of their jail terms. Further on this, the Baptists promote the belief that

Literacy ministry is a God- centred, love in action ministry. It is not merely about teaching others how to read and write. Literacy ministry is the believers sharing of their God given talents with others in love and with the main purpose of helping them realize their God- given potentials. (Literacy Mission Handbook, p.6-11)

This is further echoed in the same publication that the literacy programme is set up so that every illiterate, semi illiterate or drop-outs who are members of the Baptist churches should be given functional and sound education so that as to develop socially and be functional members of the society. In all, findings show that the overall perception of all stakeholders about the Literacy programme is positive although the Director agreed that there is still room for improvement in the running of the programme especially in this age of advanced technology where horizons are widening and opportunities abound for distance learning.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

It is no longer news that politicians and public spirited people all over the world have concluded that the solution to challenges of mass literacy is beyond the ability or capability of the government or certain groups or individuals. The maxim "education for all is the responsibility of all" rings truer now more than ever before. The millennium development goals emphasize education as a right especially for the girl child. The reference to the girl child is not misplaced here in Nigeria considering the gender dimension to the Literacy problem. According to Churs (2004), women constitute the majority of illiterates in Nigeria. In 1990, the proportion of literate men to women was 54:31 and the total

female literacy rate was far below 15% while that of men was above 58%. It is however gladdening to note that during the field work for this paper, the researcher saw mostly females (in the Baptist Literacy classes visited) both as teachers and learners. Based on the findings of this paper, one can conclude that the Literacy Programme of the Nigerian Baptist Convention is successful and has met the objectives for which it was set-up especially those of empowering the members. Secondly, findings suggest that though there are many challenges facing this programme, they are not peculiar to the Nigerian Baptist Literacy Programme but are similar to the problems of Adult Literacy encountered elsewhere in other developing countries where adult literacy is engaged in. The challenges include teacher and student mobility, absenteeism, poor learning conditions among others.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that more churches be sensitized on the viability of the literacy programme for the empowerment of their members. If any single group has the credibility and clout to mobilize people to action in Nigeria then it is the religious group. The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Winners Chapel, the Christ Apostolic Church, the Anglican Diocese, The Catholic Church of Nigeria and the myriad Pentecostal congregations in Nigeria host a sizeable percentage of the over 40% illiterates in Nigeria. If these churches form a coalition and borrow a leaf from the Nigerian Baptist Convention's Literacy programme, then the problem of illiteracy will become surmountable. One of the instructors interviewed spoke of how a friend who attends Winners Chapel, got to know about the Baptist Literacy programme and invited them to come and help launch a literacy intervention in her parish. That centre is presently running and the attempt could snowball into a Nationwide Literacy programme in the hundreds of Winner's Chapel parishes spread all over Nigeria.

One can easily anticipate the multiplier effect if more denominations join in. This becomes more effective if a counter religious movement springs up in the North and advocates Boko Dole (Western education is mandatory) as opposed to Boko Haram (Western education is forbidden).

Presently, Nigeria boasts of not less than 10 Christian Faith Based Universities: Baptists (Bowen) Seventh Day Adventist (Babcock) Redeem Christian Church of God (Redeemer's Varsity) Christ Apostolic Church (JABU) Winners Chapel (Covenant University) just to mention a few. This shows that education is still a major concern to the Nigerian Christian. Their Muslim counterparts are not left out as the country now has a handful of Islamic faith based Universities. How much more meaningful would this concern be if we address basic literacy with the same vigor with which religious bodies are setting up private Universities? If all the religious organizations, Christians, Muslims would come together and see the literacy of their members as a social responsibility, then we can also look forward to education for all in the year 2015. One can then imagine the number of Mrs. Owotundes (like the one in our introduction) who will be proud and happy worshippers, who can not only hear the word but read for themselves and be like the *Berean* Christians cited in Acts 17:10-15 who went back home after each meeting to read for themselves and confirm what the Apostles had said.

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