



Social and Political Literacy: A Philosophical Examination of Literacy Enhancement and Achievement Project in Nigeria

¹Matthew Ikechukwu Obijekwu, ²Amaka Evelyn Chidebe &
³Johnpaul Chinedu Enemuo

^{1&2}School of General Studies, Anambra State Polytechnic, Mgbakwu, Anambra State

³Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

This paper philosophically considered the relevance of social and political literacy in Nigeria. It also evaluated the role of literacy enhancement and achievement project (LEAP) in promoting social and political literacy in Nigeria. There is no doubt that the primary objective of education hinges on producing quality students who will contribute to nation building. To this end, most education policies such as quality assurance policy have solely concentrated on realizing the objective of education as stipulated in the National Policy of Education in Nigeria. But as these policies are being pronounced or formulated so also achieving literacy becomes elusive or distorted, especially the social and political literacy. By employing analytic method, this paper analyzes the concepts social and political literacy. With this method also, this paper examined the impact of LEAP in promoting socio-political literacy in Nigeria. The study discovered that the hallmark of LEAP is basically enhancing quality assurance in Nigeria education system. The paper concluded that LEAP will be instrumental in the promotion of social and political literacy in Nigeria.

Key words: Social and political literacy, philosophical investigation and LEAP

Introduction

The wake of the twenty first century came with a lot of revolutionary tendencies globally. The dawn of the twenty first century has been very much rapped with a lot of critical moves

and behavior. The society and the way people view and conceive are quite different. The human person is both a social and a political being and as such, cannot be complete without being member of a particular society, because no man is an Island and no one exists for himself alone. No man can ever be sufficient in and with himself without the presence of other members of the society, thus there is a necessary and indispensable interdependency embedded in the DNA of man. Thus, the natural compulsory need for a good number of people to occupy and make up a particular community or society as the case may be gives birth to politics, which is a necessary aspect of the human person. Man according to Aristotle, is a political being. Consequently, it is very imperative that every member of the society should achieve at least at the minimal level, a fundamental social and political literacy not only for the local society but also for global relevance.

Illiteracy is antithetical to literacy. Illiteracy has been among the major problem facing human society, especially the developing world. Regarding this, many organizations both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been formed to eradicate illiteracy from the world. Amongst these organizations formed includes: International Literacy Organization (ILO), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Other organizations like World Bank, International Center for Research on Women, International Labour Organization, World Health Organization, etc in one way or the other are making efforts towards promoting literacy amongst the member states. In view of this also, a day has been designated as the global International literacy day, precisely every "September 8" to mark literacy celebration.

In Nigeria, Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN), through the Literacy Enhancement and Achievement Project (LEAP), has been at the forefront of literacy promotion. But as that is being done, social and political literacy seems to have been considered unimportant in Nigeria. Nigeria, starting from her independence till date, has been undergoing serious social and political crises. Some of these problems could be predicated on high level of socio-political illiteracy that is prevalent amongst many Nigerians. It is against this backdrop that this paper considers the global relevance of socio-political literacy through the instrumentality of the Literacy Enhancement and Achievement Project (LEAP) in Nigeria. The question remains: how do we achieve social and political literacy in Nigeria? To what extent can LEAP assist in achieving social and political literacy in Nigeria? In doing this, this paper will first and foremost embark on conceptual clarification of concepts employed; b,

considers the global relevance of literacy; c, considers the relevance of socio-political literacy in Nigeria; d, examines the strategies of achieving social and political literacy through LEAP, and finally will the conclusion.

Conceptual Clarification

The terms to be clarified here include: Social and political literacy, philosophical investigation and LEAP. With this, unintended confusion or ambiguity in this work will be cleared.

Social/Society

Social and political literacy as used here is a compound word. The words, *social and political* serve as adjective, which qualify "literacy". It makes specific the type of literacy we are talking about in this paper. The concept social is derived from the word society. The word, society is from the Latin word, *societas* which means "society". The *Illustrated Oxford Dictionary* (1998, p. 788) defines society as the sum of human conditions and activity regarded as a whole functioning interdependently. The concept, *social* as the derivative of society can be used in different ways such as social work, social security, social studies, social network, social conscience, social contract, etc. These words as said refer to one aspect of societal activities or the other, which are very relevant to the holistic activity of every human society. It has to do with mutual relation of human beings or of class of human beings living as communities. This is the reason Aristotle sees man as a social animal, and as well states that he who is not able to live with his fellow man is either a beast or a god".

Political/Politics

On the other hand, just like the word "social", political as an adjective has other related usage like political party, political correctness, political economy, political consciousness, political convention, political science, etc. The concept, "politics" from where political is derived is an activity of human person. It is also related to politicking, which means engagement in political activities. Plato once says that man is "a political animal". So, politics is an activity of humans as they try to organize their society.

Nexus between Society and Politics

Tracing the origin of politics, Okere (2015) states that politics comes from the Greek word 'polis' which is the city. Thus, it means the business of the city. In those days of the Greek

city states, the business of the state was common interest as opposed to individual interest. It defines, realizes, and fashions individual interest, into the interest of all

Aghamelu, Okeke and Chibuzor (2009, p. 11) opine that philosophers have written so much on the vision of political society. These positions tend to prescribe certain moral, theoretical and nonnative grounds as a justification for the wide spread spheres of authority and influence of the political society. Society and politics are two different concepts that can never stand differently in the explanation and the understanding of their meaning. One cannot possibly talk about society and make a complete thesis without mentioning the politics as an indisputable part of man and the society since man is a political being. Politics deals with the coordination of people or groups in a given geographical space. Due to the fact that the society is made up of group of individuals and these group of individuals live and dwell with other members, it becomes imperative that the society would be conducted in such a way that there would be law, peace, order and justice, and these invariably are the functions that politics is expected to be performing for the society. In other words, politics can never be possible in the isolation of the society and their can never be a society that can be devoid of politics. Politics happens in the society, and as a matter of fact, it is a day to day affair of the society and as such, every member of a given society must as a matter of utmost necessity be socially and politically aware of what is happening in the society in which he or she lives. Aghamelu, Okeke and Chibuzor (2009, p. 11) thus opine that politics is a definite form of social organization geared towards the achievement of some common goal. It is essentially about governance, and it primarily involves the structuring of power for achieving some articulated goals. Politics has a huge social consequence and his political attitude is quite inherent. Aghamelu, Okeke and Chibuzor (2009) commenting on Aristotle concluded that man is political because he is social, and a political question does not arise except in pursuit of the realization of the social exigencies of human nature. Man's relationship with other members of the society makes man a social being. This social and political indisputable characteristic of man imposes a moral and cooperate obligation of being aware of what is happening in the society, it is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine the impact of literacy enhancement and achievement program. Since good is that which everybody aspires, politics is that which should guarantee in its wholesomeness the common good of the common man in the society. Politics is seen in various aspects of man in the society, ranging from aspirations, culture, growth, development, identity and even self determination. Consequently, it is imperative that the average member of the society should

be aware of that which guarantees his/her good in the society in which he/she lives and that is politics.

Literacy at a Glance

In this section, we shall examine what literacy means in this context, because words differ and vary based on the context in which they appear or in which they are being used. Literacy seems to imply 'knowledge', the ability of one or a member of the society to be aware socially and politically. Literacy here could be interchanged with knowledge. Knowledge, according to Quinton (1967) is a justified true belief. Knowledge could also be seen as understanding, the ability and or the quality of one to gain or to have familiarity over a particular thing often times gained through exposure and or experience. It is being in the capacity of being familiar with a subject, being obviously aware and the ability to understand something. It could be in two forms, namely: theoretical and practical and could also be acquired directly or indirectly by studies, investigation, observation or experience through formal and or informal way.

Perhaps, literacy is a generic word. It cuts across every areas of life, or rather field of learning. Literacy according to the *Illustration Oxford Dictionary* (1998, p. 473) is defined "as the ability to read and write", Though, this is a conscripted definition of literacy. It is really restrictive. At present, the definition of literacy has been expanded beyond its traditional definition as the ability to read and write. This is the facial value of literacy, that is, at face value, literacy implies basically the ability to read and write. Today, literacy is considered as a human selfconscious activity. Its definition seems to have been modified to accommodate other areas of human activities or operations. As the world advances in areas of science and technology, other human activities are put into consideration. Currently, technological innovation and advancement has made it possible to be talking of computer literacy as a platform for job employment. Other areas involved; health literacy, multimedia literacy, critical literacy, information literacy, visual literacy, geo-literacy, ecological literacy, statistical literacy and so many related types of literacies.

However, all these types of literacy impact seriously in the society of humans. The concept of literacy is no longer restrictive. Literacy is now enlarged to include the ability to operate computers, identify images, manipulate numbers, use languages and other important means to understand, communicate, obtain information or have gainful knowledge, especially in

solving mathematical problems as well as using symbol systems as seen in cultures (UNESCO, 2004, p. 150). In a nutshell, UNESCO defines literacy as:

The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. In this way, literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potentials, and to participate fully in their community and wider society (p.150).

From the excerpt, we can rightly observe that literacy involves a continuum of learning, which enables an individual or a group to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potentials, and at the same time, assist them to participate optimally in their community affairs. It is from this definition of literacy that we consider the title of this paper necessary. It is also from this perspective that Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN) with the theme of the conference: "Paradigm Shift in Literacy in and out of School Setting: For Global Relevance" set out to consider the global relevance of literacy. Having taken note of the above, let us consider the relevance of philosophy in this study. In doing this, we shall first and foremost examine the meaning of philosophy and why it is necessary in this study.

Philosophy and Philosophical Investigation

Drawing from Obijekwu and Muomah (2018, p. 49), the concept, philosophy has been a controversial one. As a result, it has no universal definition. But, in as much as the concept, philosophy has no universal definition, its etymology remains a point of reference. Etymologically, therefore, the term, *philosophy* as coined from two Greek words, *philia* and *sophia* means, "love" and "wisdom". Combining the two words, we have "love of wisdom". In wisdom, we search for the ultimate truth of reality, or the rational explanation of the cause of things or events. That is, the rationale behind every policy, every action, every duty or responsibility. As one philosophizes, one seeks to find out the reason, or the rational explanation of everything around him or her. The concept of philosophy, as given by Collins English Dictionary (1991), is a field of study that is concerned with investigating the meaning of concepts by applying the laid down principles of reasoning. It can also be defined as a field of study that discovers the truth of propositional interconnectivity through rational argument as well as their implications to human communication and society in general. It

lays bare the natural structure of things, and at the same time looks at the components and the significance of scientific and unscientific beliefs. In showing the complexity of philosophy, the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (1995), defines philosophy as "thinking about thinking". Generally, this portrays philosophy as the second-order activity as well as a reflective venture, which has to do with the formation of ideas, beliefs, and construction of knowledge about the universe and its components.

In this work, the term, *philosophy* is employed as a tool in a philosopher's hand to discover the truth just as clay is used in a potter's hands to mould a pot. At this point, this paper investigates the philosophical underpinning of literacy enhancement and achievement project in Nigeria.

Philosophical Underpinning of LEAP

Francis Beacon once says that "knowledge is power". It is a clear fact that illiteracy retards development. It is often agreed that literacy comes through reading. One cannot just begin to read if the person is not taught on how to read. This is why reading is considered key to literacy. Literacy acquisition is not only restricted to children in the primary and secondary school. Literacy for all remains the underlying frontier towards achieving the UNESCO's goal.

The philosophical basis of LEAP is attached to its objective(s) or its rationale. The basic foundation of LEAP is laid on the children's to rights literacy as it is globally promoted by the International Literacy Association. According to the International Literacy Association, cited in the Anambra State Literacy Festival (2018, p.39) the children have the rights to : a) appreciate early reading instruction based on their individual needs; b) to read instruction that builds both the skill and the desire to read increasingly complex materials; c) to have well-prepared teachers who keep their skills up to date through effective professional development; d) to access a wide variety of books and other reading materials in the classroom, school, and community libraries; e) to read assessment that identifies their strength as well as their needs and involve them in making decisions about their own learning; f) to receive intensive instruction from Professionals specifically prepared to teach reading; g) to read instruction that involves parents and communities in their academic lives; h) to read instruction that makes skilled use of their first languages; i) to have equal access to

the technology used for the improvement of reading instruction; and j) to a classrooms that optimize learning opportunities.

Having access to varieties of books should not exclude socio-political materials. It is obvious that the information makes and refines a person. The above rights can be structured under the following factors, namely; the resource persons (professional teachers); the students; environment where the students are living as well as learning; and materials they are using to learn. The activities of LEAP are such that if its method is applied in matter of socio-political literacy will increase political participation or awareness in Nigeria.

Second, catch them young seems to have been the usual maxim in promoting the welfare of children all over the global. We can also say that this maxim has remained one of the philosophical underpinnings of LEAP in Nigeria. Onukaogu (2018, p.4) states that LEAP project has been based on the need for Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) to have the literacy empowerment. This is to be done in such a way that children are trained to receive and give information creatively and critically in the core school subjects such as English, Basic Science, and Mathematics as well as in the other school subjects across the school curriculum. The project is structured being aware that the student at the JSS would graduate to the Senior Secondary School level (SSS), and that LEAP should begin so as to correct whatever faulty foundation JSS students brought with them from the primary school before they move over models to promote active teaching and to the SSS level. learning,

Regarding this, the project was designed to equip ISS teachers with the knowledge, attitude and skills in order to empower their students to not only become critical readers and writers, but to also become able to take full responsibility for their own learning. To achieve this feat, implementing teachers, needed to be trained on how to: a) receive information from the written text, b) organize the information in usable chunks for easy use and communication, c) store the information in appealing [onus to aid recovery and use during communication, d) develop the capability to retrieve information from stored sources and finally, e) be able to share written information with diverse audiences (Onukaogu, 2018, p.4).

The Impact of LEAP in Promoting Social and Political Literacy

The question remains: What is the impact of LEAP in promoting social and political literacy in Nigeria? There is no doubt that LEAP has been instrumental in promoting literacy in

Nigeria. Literacy as defined earlier is all encompassing when considered from different perspectives such as information literacy, mathematical literacy, social media literacy, social and political literacy, etc. Each of these types of literacies depends on what the society or the transmitters of literacy like teachers intend to communicate, or transfer to the learners. In teaching literacy, LEAP's methodologies have been significant. Among these methodologies is its democratic approach. Osisoma, cited in the Anambra State Literacy Festival (2016, p. 6), asserts that:

LEAP project is built on the promise that unless learning is fun, goal-oriented, and participatory, students may not want to endure the pressure of learning or take risks in seeking information to meet expected LEAP goals and objectives. It is also grounded on the notion that learning is socially constructed. This is why collaboration and group work were used extensively in the LEAP literacy workshop models to promote active teaching and learning.

The above excerpt lays much emphasis on "team or group work", "participatory activities"; and "collaboration" which really promote mutual understanding, cooperative existence, and accommodation of the weak learners. It also bridges the gap of inequality in learning. Hence, social and political activities in every society in the world thrive on these principles. The elements of social and political activities so to speak involve respecting the rule of law and human equality, enhancing healthy social interaction, and other related social values. Other underlying approaches of social and political literacy involve exploring the fundamental and guiding principles of the society, creating awareness on the democratic principles, common norms, rules and regulations of the society.

The impact of literacy enhancement and achievement project in Nigeria can be seen, taking cognizance of the rationale of LEAP. This also underscores the objective of education in Nigeria, which is meant: (a) to build a free and a democratic society, (b) to establish just and egalitarian society; (c) to build a united, strong and self-reliant nation; (d) to build a great and dynamic economy; and finally to build a society where all citizens are given bright

opportunities (Obijekwu & Moumah, 2018, p. 53). Following from national goals of education are the basic foundations of the democratic society as enshrined in 1999 constitution as amended, namely; liberty, equality of all men, rule of law, political participation, right to vote and voted for, etc. The United Nation Charter of 1945 granted basic rights to all human being irrespective of time and place. These rights are also enshrined in chapter five, section 33-45 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, These rights include: the right of life, right to dignity of human person, right to freedom, right to personal liberty, right to fair hearing, right to private life and family life, right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, right to expression, press and opinion, right to peaceful assembly and association, right to freedom of movement, right to acquire and own immovable property, right to education, right to vote and voted for in any election.

In other words, social and political literacy involves making these foundations of society understandable and applicable to both young and old, adult and children, and men and women. These are universal principles, or rather sociopolitical principles of which every member of society should understand and apply them for betterment of the entire society and the world at large. In achieving this, operations of the literacy enhancement and achievement project can never be over emphasized. Children, before becoming adults, should be trained from childhood to adopt such democratic principles as stated above. Catching them young from the primary and secondary school level is very important. The educational stakeholders (both the federal and state ministries of education) should encourage and assistance the LEAP curriculum developers to lay much emphasis on democratic principles like accountability, social justice, equality, honesty and other social values so as to enhance social and political literacy in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Effort so far in this paper has been to draw attention to the relevance of social and political literacy, and the impact of literacy enhancement and achievement project in Nigeria. Literacy

enhancement and achievement has been the major responsibility of the United Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization in the world, and Nigeria being a member state is not left out in this programme. Literacy achievement and enhancement Project (LEAP) is amongst the activities of Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN) to enhance literacy in Nigeria. In this paper, the philosophical underpinning of LEAP and how it will contribute in promoting socio-political literacy in Nigeria is examined, Among its rationale is the desire to maintain and achieve the basic rights of children to literacy as championed by the International Literacy Association (ILA).

The paper concludes that since the hallmark of LEAP is basically enhancing quality assurance in Nigeria education system, that it will be highly instrumental in the promotion of social and political literacy in Nigeria. There is need to develop curriculum based leadership qualities, accountability, gender equality, social justice and other social values for harmonization within the confines of LEAP activities in Nigeria. This, we argue, will increase socio-political involvement and participation in the midst of political apathy that has for sometime blinded many Nigerians. When every member of the Nigerian society becomes aware socially and politically, it would go a long way to enhance and breed a nation of developed citizenry. When the majority of the citizen is socially and politically aware from the cradle, it would no doubt place the country on a right pedestal to growth and development and by extension place and position the country well on the global charter.

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