

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Aliteracy: A threat to educational development

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**Illiteracy had always been described as the bane to development, either at individual or societal level. Hence, government over the years had continued to put several educational programmes to increase the literacy rate of the people. However, the writer of this paper have identified aliteracy as the principal problem of development; those who have the ability or proficiency to read and write lack the interest and desire to do so any longer. This problem could be attributed to some modern technology which seems to discourage the culture of “readers and writers” but encourage that of “listeners and watchers”. Way-outs are then suggested.**

**Keywords:** Aliteracy, illiteracy, educational development

## INTRODUCTION

Every human being is born into a society where he becomes a social being through interaction with others. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (2001:664) presents Language as a system of communication by written or spoken words, which is used by the people of a particular country or area. This definition stressed the two modes of language- spoken and written. In a similar vein, The Encyclopedia Americana describes language as the faculty and ability possessed by normal human beings and by no other species of using a spoken or written utterance to represent mental phenomena or events. By implication therefore, language makes human species distinct from other species.

Language may be acquired consciously through the process of learning. Language acquisition is part of the psychological composition that makes up the personality of a normal human being. Language acquisition comprises four basic skills of language. This can be classified into two: primary and secondary skills of language. The primary skills described as the orally skills embrace the listening and speaking skills.

The secondary skills which are also described as the literacy skills comprise the reading and writing skills.

Reading is considerably vital to the attainment of literacy. Reading is the fulcrum or cornerstone of literacy and that without it there can be no literacy. With every activity of meaningful reading comes expansion of horizon of learning, hence, the more a student reads, the more background knowledge he or she acquires about other ways of life, behaviour and thought. However, the acquisition of the two secondary skills makes someone literate while someone who is illiterate lacks the two skills.

The Cambridge International Dictionary of English defines literacy as the ability to read and write. Chinsky (Stubbs, 1985) explained that;

a person is literate who in a language he speaks, can read with understanding anything he would have understood if it had been spoken to him; and can write, so that it can be read, anything he can say.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines literacy as the "ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Some definitions of literacy according to Moats (2000) consider it the ability to "read, write, spell, listen, and speak.

A literate person is not only one who has acquired proficiency in writing and reading for pure academic purpose but includes one who has acquired enough ability in the same skills for practical purposes of daily

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life. Illiteracy however, implies the opposite of literacy. It is mainly the inability to read and write. An illiterate person could be described as one who at an age where he would be expected to have done so, has not learned to read and write. Today, as the terms 'literate' and 'illiterate' are used, it is possible to be literate in one context and yet be illiterate in another. The purpose for which written or printed words are used are so varied that it is quite easy to be fully competent in one situation and not in another.

By and large, it may be inferred from the various definitions available that the notions literacy and illiteracy imply respectively, the possession and lack of the ability to read and write. One pertinent issue needs to be addressed and clarified here. One may possess the ability to do a task and may not be willing to do it. Having the ability to read and write does not in any way imply having the desire or interest to read and write. Aliteracy is the state of being able to read but being uninterested in doing so. This phenomenon has been reported as a problem occurring separately from illiteracy, which is more common in the developing world while aliteracy is primarily a problem in the developed world.

According to the Cambridge International Dictionary of English "ability" means the physical or mental power or skill needed to do a thing while "desire" implies the strong feeling of wanting or willing to do a thing. It is quite possible that one who has the ability to read and write may lack the strong feeling or desire to engage in the activities. The fact being that one may not always be in the form of readiness though one has attained level of maturation. Many people today who are literate (having the ability to read and write) find it strenuous to read and write. This reading problem has been described as 'aliteracy'.

Merriam – Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines aliteracy as the quality or state of being able to read but being uninterested in doing so. It is a reading problem which occurs when reading ability can no more be matched by reading desire. In other words, a literate person now sees reading and writing as a chore or a task rather than as a pleasure. It implies the ability to read but an indifference and boredom with reading for academic and enrichment purposes.

This seems to be a general problem. Even developed nations which boast of high percent literacy rate suffer this problem. For instance, the Awake publication of January 1996 reported that the United States could boast of 97 percent literacy rate yet about half of American adults seldom read books or magazines. Even in Nigeria today, so many people prefer to sit back and watch events on the screen rather than read about them on the pages of the paper. In actual fact, with the increase in technology, the prospect of spending leisure time or even creating time to plough through books does not seem as easy as it did in the past. Many people have attributed the causes of aliteracy to fatigue, defects, nature of

environment, tight schedule, academic state and laziness. Studies have also shown that secondary school students do not have interest in reading because of their negative attitude, lack of motivation and the influence of home videos and computer games.

Nigerian government over the years had made frantic efforts to increase the literacy rate of the citizens. This had been demonstrated through various programmes like the universal free primary education in the Western region, the Eastern region and at Federal level in 1955, 1957 and 1976 respectively. Currently the Federal government has embarked on the Universal Basic Education whose goals, as stated in the implementation blueprint, are to universalize access to basic education, produce a conducive learning environment and to eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria within the shortest possible time. Part of the specific objectives of the programme is to ensure the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy.

As contained in the National policy on Education, Government aims to eradicate illiteracy at the shortest possible time by organizing a nation-wide mass literacy campaign based on various strategies including that of "each – one – teach- one". Nevertheless, how far can this be achieved when those who are literate and are expected to teach others lack the desire to read often anymore?

In schools, students do not find reading and writing interesting and this affects their academic performance. Most of the students cannot analyse and comprehend facts and interpret examination questions accurately. A larger percent of the teachers interviewed admitted that most of their students find reading and writing boring and difficult. Some of the teachers even confessed that they sometimes suffer the same problem. Evidence is shown in the general performance of students at both internal and certificate examinations. The main problem is that most of them have poor reading ability and their writings are full of illogicality, ambiguity and incoherence. One does not need to wonder far what effect this could have on the future of the Nigerian society in terms of educational and socio-economic development.

### **Statement of the problem**

Many literate or educated people no longer see reading and writing as a pleasure. This seems to be a general problem. So many people prefer to sit back and watch events on the screen rather than read about them on the pages of the paper. In actual fact, with the increase in technology, the prospect of spending leisure time or even creating time to plough through books does not seem as easy as it did in the past. The focus of this study is to find out the implication of aliteracy on the educational development in Nigeria. The study attempted to find answers to the following questions

S/N	ATTRIBUTES OF ALITERACY	Yes	%	No	%
1	I prefer reading novels to watching movies	33	16.5%	167	83.5%
2	I get tired easily when I read	132	66%	68	34%
3	I am more relaxed when I watch videos than when I read stories	141	70.5%	59	29.5%
4	Reading is a strenuous act	177	88.5%	23	11.5%
5	Watching television is fun	136	68%	64	32%
6	I'll rather call than send an SMS on my cell phone	107	53.5%	93	46.5%
7	I always read along the written illustrations when watching a sub-titled movie	56	28%	144	72%
8	I prefer to join a novel club to joining a video club	32	16.5%	167	83.5%
9	It is easier writing a letter than talking on phone	11	5.5%	189	94.5%
10	When on a journey, I prefer reading novel, magazine etc to playing video games	57	28.5%	143	71.5%
11	I'll rather chat with co-passengers to combat boredom on a journey than read	132	66%	68	34%
12	I prefer listening to news to reading newspapers	178	89%	22	11%

1. What are the traits of aliteracy exhibited by literate adults?
2. Does aliteracy have effect on development?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The survey method was adopted in this study carried out in two tertiary institutions in Lagos state. (Lagos state university, Ojo and Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Ijanikin) Two hundred literate adults that comprised lecturers and students were used as sample for the study.

### Instrumentation

The instrument used for this study was a questionnaire. There were twelve (12) items that elicit respondents' opinions on features and effect of aliteracy. They were required to tick 'Yes' or 'No'. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity and administered by research assistants.

### Method of Analysis

Descriptive statistics of percentage was used to analyse the responses of the respondents

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings of study, as presented in the table 1 above, revealed that a larger percentage, 167 (83.5%) and 132 (66%) prefer readings novels to watching movies and get tired easily when they read respectively. 141(70.5%) feel more relaxed when they watch videos than when they read stories while 177 (88.5%) see reading as a strenuous act and 68% agree that watching television is fun. A larger percentage of students and teachers prefer to call send an SMS on their cell phone. Also, while only few respondents, 32 (16.5%) prefer to join a novel club to joining a video club, 178 (89%) prefer listening to news to reading newspapers. By and large, findings show that a huge percentage of respondents exhibit traits of aliteracy.

## CONCLUSION

It should be noted that a lot is lost when people shun reading and writing for listening and watching. Though the later consume attention and demand logical reasoning, it should be known that they help to develop one's mental ability: As adapted from Awake Magazines of January, 1996, reading and writing widen and stimulate imagination. One may create notions and situations the way one desires while the motion – visuals like the television do most of the thinking for one.

Reading and writing require and develop verbal skills as they are inextricably linked with speech. It is obvious that one sure way of building up one's success depends on one's vocabulary as regards what one understands

when reading and how one reasons when writing.

The Nigerian society just like other societies in the modern world is fast shifting from a culture of 'readers and writers' to that of 'listeners and watchers' and may likely be shocked by the unpleasant consequences this may bring. This trend away from the written word is more than worrisome. People who have stopped reading base their future decisions on what they used to know (residual knowledge) If one does not read much, one really does not know much. This paper does not condemn film and other audio or audio-visual aids but strongly believes that these should only be used to complement reading and writing but not as substitutes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To encourage reading and writing it is advisable that individual should own a personal library equipped with interesting reading materials. Children should also be encouraged to read from a tender age. They should also own a young library to be monitored by the parents. Also, a reading conducive atmosphere should be created to make reading a pleasurable experience. For children time limits should be set on watching of films and other television programmes. Study time should be designed and reading room or reading corner made well illuminated. All reading materials should be available within immediate reach to prevent having to move about in search of the, as this may make one lose interest. Educators need to look at factors such as their attitude toward children, the way children learn, and the

curriculum. These factors may have an enormous impact on creating lifelong positive attitudes about reading. The implication of people lacking interest or desire to read and write surely will be adverse on the development of formal education. Reading and writing are a behaviour. Regular practice aids perfection when an activity is not done regularly it may lead to extinction of the behaviour.

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