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LITERACY AND ADULT EDUCATION

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EDUCATION
AND THE ARTS
NATIONAL COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON
EDUCATION AND THE ARTS
FOR THE YEAR 1964

The National Council on Education and the Arts was established by the National Defense Education Act of 1958. Its purpose is to coordinate and support the efforts of the Federal Government, the States, and the private sector in the field of education and the arts. The Council is composed of representatives from the Department of Education, the Department of the Interior, the Department of the Navy, the Department of the State, the Department of the Treasury, the Department of the Army, the Department of the Air Force, the Department of the Space Administration, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Social Sciences, and the National Endowment for the Natural Sciences.

The Council's activities are carried out through a number of committees and subcommittees. The most important of these are the Committee on Education, the Committee on the Arts, the Committee on the Humanities, the Committee on the Social Sciences, and the Committee on the Natural Sciences. Each of these committees is responsible for recommending to the Council the policies and programs that should be supported by the Federal Government in its field.

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EDUCATION AND THE ARTS

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON

EDUCATION AND THE ARTS FOR THE YEAR 1964

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The General Assembly of the United Nations, at its sixteenth session, considering the great importance of literacy and general education to the development of peaceful and friendly relations between nations and peoples, invited UNESCO to make a general review of the question of mass illiteracy throughout the world, with a view to recommending practical and effective measures for the eradication of illiteracy at both the international and the national level.

The purpose of the present document is to examine the problem of illiteracy in a country which, by virtue of its economic resources, its political and administrative organization, the composition and distribution of its population, the percentage of illiterate persons, the efforts made to eradicate illiteracy, and so on, may be taken as fairly representative of the over-all world situation. It will thus be possible to present a study of the illiteracy problem and the measures recommendable for its solution in concrete and objective fashion, and at the same time to avoid lapsing into generalizations such as are already all too common.

The country dealt with, then, is a hypothetical one, whose situation, with slight variations, in one respect or another, may well coincide with that of existing countries.

Let us assume that the population of this country numbers 4,298,000, broken down by age groups as follows:

Under 1 year	154,411
From 1 to 4 years	565,145
From 5 to 9 years	614,223
From 10 to 14 years	510,577
From 15 to 19 years	453,610
From 20 to 24 years	407,985
From 25 to 44 years	993,725
Over 45 years	587,274
Age not specified	1,050

Total 4,298,000

/Of the

Of the 2,452,594 persons aged 15 years or over, 1,079,141 or 44 per cent have been classified as illiterate. The breakdown of illiteracy by age groups is as follows:

Age groups Percentage of illiteracy

15-19	34.73
20-24	36.88
25-44	44.76
45-64	51.95
Over 65	61.47

The percentage of illiteracy is 41.84 among males above 15 years of age, and among females in the same age group, 58.16.

1. The current programme

The country's literacy programme is not the direct responsibility of the State, but is in the hands of a private agency. For the discharge of its functions, this agency has at its disposal special funds deriving from an annual issue of stamps to the value of 25,000 dollars, authorized by a Decree of Congress.

Among the causes of illiteracy in this country, the following are some of the most important:

- (a) The semi-feudal social and economic structure, which since colonial times has excluded large population groups from opportunities of well-paid work and general enlightenment;
- (b) The scattered rural population and the lack of satisfactory means of communication and diffusion of information;
- (c) The shortage of schools and teachers in relation to the total school-age population, and the high rate of wastage among the pupils;
- (d) The indifference of the authorities to the problem of the rural population and the inefficiency of the Government in budgetary matters;
- (e) The low degree of industrialization and economic development.

/2. Characteristics

2. Characteristics and results of the campaign now under way

The body responsible for the literacy campaign uses a modified form of Laubach's Synthetic Method for teaching purposes, since it is very simple and does not require highly-trained personnel. To begin with, average costs per person taught to read by this method are minimal, i.e. 0.50 dollars per capita. To carry out its work, the agency has produced the indispensable teaching material in the shape of primers, guides and instructions. In some cases, it also uses the leaflets issued by the Biblioteca Popular Latinoamericana. It spends half its subsidy, i.e., an annual sum of 12,500 dollars, on the production of material.

Between 1944 and 1957, according to the available data, the 3,000 teachers working under the agency, most of them rural schoolmasters offering their services on a voluntary basis, taught 179,724 illiterate persons to read, that is, approximately five persons per teacher per year.

Unfortunately, the work done so far represents only the initial phase of a functional literacy campaign - first steps in reading and writing based on the use of the primer. The stages of consolidation and application of the skills acquired are still to come, as is the production of supplementary material and the use of reading and writing as instruments of individual and community betterment. In brief, reading and writing are not yet functional habits and skills for most of the adults who learn them. The attainment of these targets will call for greater economic resources, teaching methods designed to promote the training of competent readers, qualified personnel and production of abundant teaching and reading material. Unless the requisite effort is made in the country under consideration to achieve the objectives of functional literacy, there will continue to be the problem of most of those given such rudimentary instructions relapsing into illiteracy.

In this connexion, it is well to bear in mind the now widely accepted principle that literacy is merely a means to an end, an instrument for the attainment of higher goals, and that its integration in comprehensive adult education and general community development programmes alone can render it functional and effective. Hitherto, most of the efforts made in this country to combat illiteracy have been of an isolated and tentative character.

/In addition,

In addition, more than 33 per cent of the children of school age, that is, in the 7 to 14 age group, do not go to school. Consequently, most of these children will reach their fifteenth birthday without having received primary education, and year after year, therefore, will swell the number of illiterate adults. For example, in 1960 there were 879,398 children of school age, of whom only 615,747 attended school, so that 264,651 were left without any form of instruction. The shortage of teachers and of school premises is also overwhelming; for if all children of school age are to be given education, about 6,600 additional teachers will be required at once, and 3,518 new schools with an average of two classrooms each will have to be built. These estimates are based on the principle of allocating to each teacher forty of the children not at present attending school.

3. Towards a solution of the problem

To dispose of the illiteracy problem once and for all, the Government must organize a long-term plan combining concrete measures for eradicating adult illiteracy with others designed to provide broader and more practical training, as well as to expand primary school facilities until all children of school age can be given complete primary education. On the basis of the experience of other countries where the percentages of illiterate persons were high and where illiteracy has successfully been eliminated (USSR, Japan and Puerto Rico), estimates indicate that it would take the country under discussion about twenty years to attain this target.

Of course, the length of time required to eradicate illiteracy depends upon a number of factors - economic, political, administrative and so forth. If, for example, the literacy campaign forms part of an over-all economic development plan or of a political reform, the time needed will be considerably less, and the lines on which the literacy campaign is conducted will themselves have to be different.

The first step might be the promulgation of the appropriate legislative and presidential decrees required to put a comprehensive adult education programme on a legal footing as part of the country's educational system. Such decrees might indicate the share of responsibility for adult education /incumbent upon

incumbent upon the various Ministries and government departments, as well as the economic sources to be drawn upon for the financing of the programme. Again, the chief responsibility for adult education might be centralized in the hands of the Government and a number of non-governmental organizations allowed to co-operate. The decrees in question might establish a Literacy and Adult Education Department designed on a technical basis, with an adequate degree of autonomy and sufficient funds at its disposal, and responsible for organizing adult literacy and education programmes. Another desirable measure would be the constitution of a committee with instructions to co-ordinate the activities of the Literacy and Adult Education Department with those of other State agencies and of private enterprise concerned with programmes bearing on adult education.

The elimination of illiteracy among adults in any country is an urgent and complex problem, inasmuch as it relates to the education of persons who, unlike children, are not always free to attend classes, have little time for study, are engaged in heavy and difficult work and are almost invariably subject to the pressure of economic difficulties.

4. The programme proposed

In view of the conditions currently prevailing in the country under consideration, it is suggested that the programme referred to should cover the five categories of activities listed below.

(a) Community education

This should be imparted as an integral part of community development programmes designed to improve social and economic conditions, especially through the inculcation of new knowledge and skills in the fields of civics, organization of co-operatives, public health, agriculture, artisan industry, domestic science, etc.

(b) Functional literacy campaign for adults

The adult literacy campaign should include the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic, preferably in combination with the community education programme, up to the stage at which these skills become resources that can really further the progress of the individual and the community.

/(c) Educational

(c) Educational extension services

This aspect of the programme is intended to benefit literate adults and all persons who have received some measure of education, complete or incomplete. Education of the type involved can be given by means of lectures, seminars, discussion groups, correspondence courses, distribution of printed matter, broadcasting, television, educational films, adult schools and workers' exchange programmes.

(d) Vocational training

This part of the programme should provide practical training for young people and adults through out-of-school activities designed to improve the occupational skills and abilities they have already acquired or to give them an opportunity of learning new ones.

(e) Youth activities

All out-of-school services and activities provided for young people should be covered by this section of the programme, including the organization and practice of sports, and irrespective of age or educational levels reached.

5. Auxiliary media

Audio-visual media are powerful instruments of adult education. They include such simple aids as reading strips, charts, maps, flannel boards, etc., and others of a more costly and complicated nature like film strips, transparencies and films. The simpler kind could be produced locally; the more complicated media could be carefully selected and adapted to the local or national environment. In addition, teachers and field workers must be trained in their manipulation and use.

Mobile museums and exhibitions may also play an important part in adult education. The Government might set them up wherever appropriate and supervise their use for educational purposes where they already exist. Similarly, wireless programmes are invaluable for adult education, but they must be organized on strictly educational lines and broadcast at times of day when adults are free to listen. Where television stations exist, they may also make an effective contribution to the adult education programme.

/For the

For the literate sector of the population, newspapers and periodicals are of the greatest importance as means of communication. The Government might take advantage of this fact by encouraging the Press to fulfil its function as an efficacious instrument of education and the propagation of literacy.

6. Training of personnel

The community education aspect of the programme requires multi-purpose workers (social promoters) or specialists in agriculture, co-operatives, domestic science, rural industries, public health, etc., to work directly among the agricultural and industrial population, either individually or as teams. In any event, they must be trained in methods of working with the people and in specific adult education techniques.

If the Government has no workers of this type at its disposal, it can train schoolmasters in community education methods. But in doing so it will have to ensure that these teachers get to know and make use of the personnel attached to agricultural, public health and other technical services, and do not neglect their own primary function.

For literacy programme purposes, each class will need a full-time teacher trained in the use of adult education techniques, who may be either a social promoter or a primary school teacher. No mention is made of the use of volunteers on account of its many drawbacks; in the first place, as they are not subject to any form of inspection or discipline, they tend to be irregular in their attendance at work, which is disastrous in the classroom, and, secondly, it is always difficult to bring them together for briefing and training purposes. In contrast, full-time teachers can look after several classes, and primary school teachers trained in adult education methods nearly always become excellent teachers of adults.

Admittedly, however, in specific cases the use of volunteers, especially students, may be necessary, and even desirable if they are suitably trained and organized. For vocational education purposes, selected workers in artisan and other industries, as well as schoolmasters, might be trained to teach their special skills to adults. Youth activities call for a variety of

/full-time and

full-time and part-time organizers and leaders. The Government might provide the full-time and interested private bodies the part-time personnel, the latter consisting in general of volunteers.

The literacy programme will also require a considerable number of supervisors, who may be selected from among the inspectors of primary schools, but must be given special training suitable for the functional adult literacy campaign.

If the Government is in agreement with the literacy programme recommended but finds itself faced with a marked shortage of teachers, it might consider the possibility of enlisting young people in a National Literacy Service, perhaps as an alternative to compulsory military service. The Government might enrol them for periods of at least one year, and give them two or three months' training for service as teachers or social promoters, paying them a small remuneration. The Rural Reconstruction Programme in the Philippines has obtained very successful results with collaborators chosen from among keen and properly-qualified young people.

Pupils in their last two years at secondary school, as well as university students, might, after suitable briefing, co-operate systematically in their local literacy programme. They might work a few hours weekly, particularly in the two more advanced stages of the functional literacy campaign. Moreover, theoretical and practical courses on adult education and functional literacy should be incorporated in the curricula of teacher training colleges.

7. Literacy and Adult Education Department

The second step might be the establishment of a Literacy and Adult Education Department within the Ministry of Education, designed on a technical basis, with an adequate degree of autonomy and sufficient funds at its disposal, to be responsible for developing the long-term plan suggested above for the elimination of adult illiteracy.

This department should be endowed with the requisite personnel and facilities for the training and supervision of teachers and other workers. In addition, it should comprise a Literacy and Adult Education Division and a National Community Development Training Centre.

/The former

The former would be responsible for all activities and undertakings connected with adult education and the eradication of illiteracy. The programme might be approached in different ways according to the requirements of the adult population. In the case of those for whom the ability to read and write is an essential prerequisite for the subsequent acquisition of knowledge and skills to enable them to improve their unsatisfactory economic and cultural situation, the programme should be directed towards promoting their functional literacy.

The programme for adults already able to read and write might be based on the following subject-matter:

- (a) Safeguarding and enrichment of the national culture;
- (b) Understanding of the social and economic changes affecting national life;
- (c) Emotional and intellectual development of the individual, to enable him to play a full and effective part in the society to which he belongs;
- (d) Promotion of international understanding, fellow-feeling and tolerance of differing points of view;
- (e) Elimination of deficiencies in the formal education received;
- (f) Training to enable the adult to play an active and effective role in the civic, social and economic life of his community;
- (g) Promotion of the wise use of leisure;
- (h) Understanding of the basic factors of the national economy.

The successful implementation of this programme would entail the training of at least 3,000 teachers and 100 supervisors.

For the first three months the activities of the programme would be concentrated on the adequate briefing of supervisors at the national and provincial level. In turn, the training and supervision of teachers would constitute the main duty of these national and provincial supervisors during the first year of the programme. According to estimates, a person of average cultural background can be turned into an efficient teacher by means of a three months' course. Thus, over a period of seven months, the supervisors should be able to train all the teachers needed for the programme.

8. Community Development Training Centre

For the training of social promoters and members of the technical staff of the various services, a National Training Centre might be established. Its functions would be as follows: (a) To train social promoters in the methods and techniques of work with the agricultural and industrial population; (b) To produce the requisite educational material for the furtherance of all aspects of the literacy and adult education programme; and (c) To conduct such research as might be necessary.

(a) Training of personnel

This section of the Centre might train up to one hundred workers yearly by means of two five-month courses every year. Students might be recruited for training and assignment to specific activities. On completion of their studies, they could be appointed to posts compatible with the training they had received. But before drawing up its programme, the Centre must try to ascertain the most important characteristics of the successful collaborator in community development programmes, together with the types of teaching and experience best suited for the training of its students.

Apprenticeship should include something more than reading books and digests, attending lectures, drafting and compiling notes and sitting for examinations; for these activities often become aims in themselves, and make but little contribution to the training that a good field worker needs. It is possible to have a thorough knowledge of the whole philosophy of community development and the ability to discuss it brilliantly and to draw up impressive work programmes, and yet to fail completely in their application. To make sure that the Centre does not train graduates of this type, its curriculum must be given true educational significance, emphasis being laid on the application of knowledge and on the solution of problems, and the responsibility for seeking these solutions being left to the students. In other words, the Centre must fuse its theoretical teaching with practical field work, so that the teaching may be of real value and consistent with the demands of the students' future activities.

/(b) Production

(b) Production of Material

The Production Section should have units to deal with planning, drafting of manuscripts, translation, illustration, printing and photography, and should also be endowed with all the necessary equipment for producing texts and high-quality audio-visual aids. It will have two main objectives: (i) To produce the material needed for each of the four stages of the literacy programme (motivation, elementary instruction in reading and writing, consolidation of skills and acquisition of more mature reading habits and skills); and (ii) To purchase, classify and distribute material of interest for the purposes of the literacy campaign and adult education.

For the motivation stage, it would produce and distribute film strips, leaflets, plays and posters to encourage interest in becoming literate. It should also select and adapt to the national environment the best of the films already produced for motivation purposes. The aim of this material would be to convince the illiterate person that he can learn to read and that reading is the key to the intellectual and material development of the individual. To this end, it is suggested that one or two short films should be used, together with four or five film strips, four or five attractive leaflets, four or five puppet plays and stage plays, and three series of posters, each on a different topic. For the second stage, that of elementary reading lessons, it is suggested that three different primers be drawn up for experimental use, embodying three different teaching methods and consistent with the teaching principles most to be recommended. These primers should be mass printed and accompanied by class-books for the pupils and teachers' guides. For the third stage, that of development of reading capacity, a set of eight to ten readers should be prepared on a range of topics interesting to adults, with a carefully-arranged vocabulary increasing in difficulty from the first to the last book in the series. For the final stage, that of acquiring more mature reading habits and skills, another series of texts must be produced, a sufficient number of copies being run off in each case. At this stage printed matter from other publishers in the country and abroad should be selected and supplied.

/However, to

However, to avoid waste of effort in producing texts and organizing their use on functional lines, a library service should be developed to transmit the material produced or purchased to the general public, and especially to the members of isolated communities. This service should be based on a central library or the Production Section of the National Training Centre, whence the material would be distributed and community libraries maintained and directed.

(c) Research

Adult education needs supporting services to meet its requirements in respect of research, evaluation, production of educational material, and distribution of texts and audio-visual aids. The purpose of these services is to ensure that teachers and social promoters are given proper training, equipment and backing. With this end in view, the following research programme should be carried out:

- (i) Basic surveys to discover the social and economic conditions and needs of rural and urban communities;
- (ii) Recordings on subjects connected with the cultural heritage of the country, folklore and folk art;
- (iii) Research on pedagogical questions, methods of teaching, writing and arithmetic to adults, methods of using audio-visual aids, and other techniques required in adult education;
- (iv) Testing of teaching materials to make sure that they serve the purposes for which they were produced;
- (v) Evaluation of projects and programmes with a view to improving methods, reducing costs and furnishing data to the organizers of the programmes in question and to those responsible for training programmes.

The cost of a literacy campaign is of course strictly proportional to the end pursued and the procedures adopted.

In the country taken as an example, the cost per person taught, according to estimates, is 50 cents. But it must not be forgotten that in this country the work done so far corresponds only to the first stage of the /functional literacy

functional literacy campaign; that the teachers offer their services voluntarily; that each of them has taught approximately five persons yearly; that the method selected does not require highly-trained personnel; and that none of the material for the phases of consolidation and application of the skills required has been produced, nor has any supplementary material.

Under the plan set forth in the present document - that is, if the aims pursued are functional literacy, the training of teachers and supervisors, the employment of personnel on a full-time basis with adequate remuneration, the production of all the necessary material in sufficient quantities, and the total elimination of adult illiteracy, irrespective of age and in the course of a period of twenty years - the cost of the literacy campaign would be approximately 16.50 dollars per person taught.

This estimate is prepared without taking into account the necessary expenditure on the improvement and expansion of primary school facilities, to enable all children of school age to be given primary education and prevent the number of illiterate adults from continuing to increase.

But if in this same country, for various reasons, including limited funds, it were decided to teach only the illiterate persons in the 15-45 age groups, the total cost would be considerably reduced, since illiterate persons over 45 years of age - approximately 300,000 - would not be taken into account.

In conclusion, it must be stressed that the success of a literacy campaign depends, inter alia, upon a clear and specific statement of its objectives; upon the relations established between the literacy programme and the programmes of agrarian reform, environmental sanitation, organization of co-operatives, industrialization, improvement and expansion of agricultural production, etc.; on the training of personnel; and on the preparation and distribution of all the necessary material and equipment.

