

ENHANCING NATIONAL SECURITY THROUGH LITERACY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Insecurity has permeated every nook and cranny of Nigeria today. Across the nation different forms of insecurity hold sway. This paper reveals that one of the major causes of insecurity is illiteracy. Nigeria currently ranks among the least educated nations in the world. Some of the traits of illiteracy include gullibility, vulnerability and poverty which are elements of insecurity. A nation with high rate of literacy is peaceful and secured, for a literate person is not irrational. Literacy empowers and enlightens. Crises, conflicts can be curbed if the citizens are equipped with the wherewithal to understand and appreciate the society they live in. This paper is therefore anchored on the theory of relative deprivation which states that insecurity and violence is a result of frustration arising from inequality of the citizens in the society. The paper concludes that if every citizen is exposed to literacy, security of life and property would be guaranteed and recommends among others that education should be made compulsory for all until the age of eighteen.

Keywords: security, conflict, literacy education, literacy and illiteracy.

Introduction

Insecurity in Nigeria today is so high that the current reality is no one is safe. Armed forces have been deployed to virtually all states in the country yet, with each passing day, the security situation in Nigeria deteriorates further. There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria is currently facing serious security challenges. Those at the helms of affairs and even the security operatives are not left out. Hardly can one sleep today with both eyes closed. Fear, apprehension and jitteriness have become the lot of Nigerians (Omoroje, Egule & Emuebie, 2020).

In the South-South, there is environmental agitation, kidnappers and militants are on the prowl; the South-East has the menace of unknown gunmen, herder-farmer clashes and other organized militants killing, burning, maiming and destroying. In the South-West, kidnapping, domestic violence, ritualists and robbery persist. The North-East has the dreaded Boko-Haram and Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) who not only abduct their victims but also kill them in gruesome manners. The North-Central and the North-West are bedeviled by bandits, unknown gunmen who raid villages and schools, kidnapping for heavy ransom, killing at will, pillaging, among other violent acts. Commenting on the despondent condition, Abuh, David and Okuku (2022) assert that the problems of insecurity in Nigeria are worsened by the low capacity of the Nigeria's police force to respond to distress calls.

Security threat has negative impact on all in the society. The security situation in Nigeria calls for extra-ordinary measures that will require a transformation in how the individuals think and look at one another. This much sought transformation can be attained by

the citizenry having access to literacy provision. Literacy remains a veritable instrument for shaping the pace of a nation's intellectual, cultural, social and economic development to guarantee the achievement of national unity, economic progress and security. Jiboku and Afolayan (2012) opine that to drive away ignorance, prevent citizens from being influenced negatively, fight poverty and prevent idleness, enlightenment (literacy) of the people is a critical factor. The national women leader of Jonde-Fam – a Fulani Cultural Association in Nigeria – Hajiya Aminatu Naseh attributes insecurity and banditry to illiteracy (Musa, 2021).

Huge amounts are yearly budgeted for security, armed forces are being expanded, yet insecurity persists. This shows that the solution to the problem may be deeper than acquiring arms and personnel to fight. For the purpose of this study, the concept of literacy and security will be discussed using the relative deprivation theory which was first propounded by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Sears (1939). The theory was propounded to link socio-political and economic inequalities in the society to rebellions and insurrections. The theory is based on the concept that persons may feel the pride of some desirable thing relative to their past, others or some social category and relative deprivation is the belief where one feels deprived of something based on comparison to some other person. This may be caused by inequalities among social groups. As individuals and group based theory of aggression, the theory argues that when expectation outstrips achievement regardless of the absolute levels of economic consumptions or provision of political rights, frustration sets in. Thus, the collective frustration turns into anger and violence (Jiboku & Afolayan, 2012). By application, security includes the ability of the state to predict the likely implication of any particular condition on its citizens and thus creates the necessary conditions that guarantee fair amount of predictability on the behaviour of its citizens. Illiteracy creates divisions: economic, social, intellectual and limits one rationing power. When these group of people are not satisfied with the expectations in the society, it touches on their behavior and they may react to the way they feel about the other strata of the society. Conflicts, agitations and frequent rise of the people against the rules of law can be explained using this theory. The failure of the government in addressing issues as illiteracy prevents people from understanding and appreciating social or community living, and the rules of law.

Concept of Literacy

The traditional definition of literacy is the ability to read and write; it also entails comprehension or the attainment of meaning as the feature of literacy. It is the ability to use language – read, write, listen and speak (Jiboku & Afolayan, 2012). In the modern context, however, current practitioners tend to define literacy in the context of its value to the individual with a focus on personal, social and cultural contexts. Ojong and Ejar, (2018) put literacy as personal, social, contextual, gender-related and constructive process whereby a particular individual builds meaning with particular text depending on particular purposes for reading and writing. Wikipedia (2022) defines literacy as reading and writing adequately for communication at a level that enables one to successfully comprehend and communicate. Literacy according to the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. It involves a continuum of learning, understanding, evaluating and engaging with written texts that enables individuals to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potentials and to participate fully in the wider society. Literacy to the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) is the ability to understand and use written information to function in a society, achieve goals and develop knowledge and potentials. From the aforementioned definitions of literacy, its functions and roles can be seen

in equipping the individuals in a society to use information to create awareness for a constructive and meaningful living.

Literacy Education

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) established reading as the foundational skill for learning, emphasizing that reading goes beyond decoding and comprehension to interpretation and decoding and comprehension to interpretation and development of new understandings (Reyes-Torres, 2020). The degree to which learners can make use of languages to read and understand texts in all formats is a key indicator of their ability to make and communicate meaning. However literacy today has evolved from language process to an act of cognition (Kucer, 2005). How can the teacher contribute to foster learners' ability to apply knowledge to new situations and create knowledge to think critically? The answer is by enabling the learner develop literary competence which is the key and ultimate goal of literacy. Language teachers should endeavor to provide learners with the opportunity to learn to think for themselves and come up with their own interpretations and conclusions. In this line of thought, literacy education is the teaching of a range of abilities and competencies that allow the learners to become independent learners using prior and background knowledge as context for new learning (Reyes-Torres, 2012). According to Kucer (2005), literacy goes beyond the capacity to read and write to constitute a socially embedded semantic system that considers writing, reading, talking and listening alongside other modes of communication. Literacy education therefore is a dynamic and multidimensional concept that aims at providing learners with the following skills:

- Organise knowledge so that it can be useful.
- Evaluate information on the basis of accuracy, validity, suitability of needs, importance and socio-cultural context.
- Develop and refine questions to frame the search for new understanding.
- Pursue personal and aesthetic growth.
- Read widely and fluently to make connection with self, the world and previous reading, and
- Maintain openness to new ideas by considering divergent opinions and changing conclusions when evidence supports the change (AASL, 2011).

Being in command of these skills allows learners develop critical minds and be ready to build their own ideological inter-relation with others. On the contrary, a poor literacy development or none of it could have serious consequences and put the individual in a risky future situation (Reyes-Torres, 2012).

Importance of Security

Security can be viewed as freedom or safety from danger or absence of threat and danger. Security according to Ojong and Ejar (2018), means various things to various people and groups. Security may be

- i. Taken as a state of wellbeing characterized by freedom from danger, risk, lack and uncertainty.
- ii. It could be seen as freedom from care, anxiety or doubt, a situation of all-round confidence.
- iii. Security can mean something that guards or makes safe, creates protection and assures defense.
- iv. It could also imply freedom from financial cares, from want or poverty in any form.

For this study, security as defined in I and III are our focus. From I and III, security may be interpreted to imply precaution taken to guard against crimes, attack, fear, terror, sabotage and espionage; a total peaceful state of mind of an individual, group or society that guarantees quality life and cohesion for the survival of the individuals and the nation. A nation that lacks security is insecure.

National Security refers to the ability of a state to cater for the protection and defence of its citizens (Osisanya, 2018) while Oshio (2009) defines national security as freedom from danger or threat to a nation's ability to protect its cherished values and wellbeing of its citizens. It refers to all the processes geared towards protecting and preserving human, socio-economics and political values, institutions, norms and value system from internal and external threats.

National Security is inevitable for individual and national development as no meaningful development can take place in an atmosphere devoid of peace and security. Orikpe (2018) decrying the state of insecurity in Nigeria averred that the country's national security is in jeopardy. He stressed that insecurity which has gripped Nigeria comes in various forms or colourations and magnitude among which are the spate of bombing, kidnapping, human trafficking, election related cases, militancy, assassination, hunger, armed robbery, arson, environmental degradation and other untoward acts being experienced in the country.

Nigeria today is insecure. Insecurity reigns! Oshio (2009) is of the view that all the instruments devised since after the Civil War of 1967 – 70 to return peace and cooperative living among Nigerians have failed, creating an inciting atmosphere that another major conflict could occur that might lead to the disintegration of Nigeria. Recently, the emergence of hostage taking or abductions, kidnappings, killings by unknown gunmen, banditry, interception of travelers and razing of farms and villages reveal that all is not well with Nigeria in terms of security of lives and property.

Yet, security is a necessary ingredient for the growth, progress and political stability of a nation. Security is vital for survival. An insecure nation cannot survive as a free and self-respecting member of the committee of nations. Security is important in a nation because it ensures productivity. Without security, there will be constant threat to lives and property, making the nation unsafe and an unsafe environment will remain undeveloped.

An insecure and dysfunctional nation has no infrastructure and economic base, such a nation will lack reliable workforce and capital. Development thrives in a country where there are no violence and constant threat to its peace and stability. A country that cannot secure its borders will always be threatened, exploited and dominated and a society that cannot protect herself against internal security threat will have no peace, no unity and integrity. Most parts of Nigeria, currently are experiencing insecurity and people are apprehensive of their safety. The situation keeps foreign investors away and Nigerian investors operate in fear because the national security of the nation is nothing to write about.

Literacy and Security

A peruse of the official UNESCO literacy rates by country reveals that the top most literate countries (Uzbekistan, Latvia, San Marino and so on) are at peace while the least literate countries – Niger, Southern Sudan, Sierra Leone – are in a state of either war or general insecurity (UNESCO, 2005). Nigeria is one of the countries that has low literacy level. The federal government in 2021 disclosed that 76 million Nigerian Adults were illiterates and over

6.9 million Nigerian children were out of school (Idoko, 2021). As at 2018, Nigeria's literacy rate was at 62.1%. However, going by regions, a large population of the literate ones are in the southern part of the country. States in the north have lagged behind in education among the 36 states of the federation. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reveals a huge gap in the literacy level between southern and northern Nigeria. According to the data, the states where majority can neither read nor write are those in the North-East, North-West and North-Central. Yobe State has 7.23%; Zamfara (19.16%); Kastina (10.36%); Sokoto (15.1%); Bauchi (19.26%); and Niger has 22.88% levels of literacy. In contrast, the Southern States – Imo (96.43%); Abia (94.24%); Anambra (92.11%); Enugu (89.46%); Cross River (89%); Edo(90.53%); Ekiti (95.99%) and Osun (90.57%) (The Guardian, 2016).

Therefore, it is no coincidence that the North, the epicentre of banditry, terrorism and kidnapping is the region with the highest rate of illiteracy and the least developed region in Nigeria. For instance, 83.3 percent of the male population in Yobe and Adamawa states have no form of formal education (Zulum, 2021). Bearing this in mind, one would not wonder why “Boko Haram” insurgency is strongest in the North-East. Illiteracy is linked to poverty. Low self-esteem plagues the illiterates. An illiterate person can lead a difficult life. The inability to find gainful employment or not being engaged at all subjects them to a life of poverty. Poverty is one of the causative factors of crime, whether it is militancy, felony, armed robbery, petty robbery or kidnapping. Being literate equips one with the right skills and expertise for gainful employment. This is buttressed by Zulum who reiterated that literacy and poverty are responsible for insurgency in Nigeria (Zulum, 2021). A university don, Dr. Ayodele has called for literacy education for all Nigerians. He describes it as a good weapon against poverty, illiteracy and terrorism. Literate Nigerians will be conscious of the evil inherent in kidnapping, terrorism and killings while being knowledgeable enough to deploy the skills acquired to make themselves relevant economically, thereby reducing poverty that may lead to criminality and evil (The Guardian, 2016). With no employment – the devil finds work for the idle man – criminality takes over. A person who is not literate will experience a hard time finding a job to engage him/her. In the words of Sen in Khan (2021), literacy is the driving force in the struggle to emancipate people from misery, insecurity and poverty.

If a nation does not spend billions educating her youths today, the nation will spend it fighting insecurity tomorrow – Goodluck Jonathan (The Guardian, 2016). Literacy is the panacea to insecurity in Nigeria. Literacy opens up the minds and enables one to think and reason before taking a decision. A literate man is not an irrational man; he does not take in everything he sees or hears without testing it. An enlightened person does not go about provoking and looking for trouble. And moreover, because his critical mind has been developed, he is not likely to be gullible.

Literacy education can guarantee human, political and socio-economic security. Literacy expands the horizon of the individuals and brings them out of their narrow, restrained vision, thereby enabling them to appreciate and participate in their economic, political and cultural milieu (UNESCO, 2005) and Adamu (2017) asserts that there is a compelling need to accord due attention to literacy as an alternative and complementary pathway in realizing the goals of quality education and lifelong learning for all. Thus, letting all have access to literacy development remains an indispensable path for promoting both individual and national security as literacy will engender access to social justice for peaceful co-existence, opportunities for all

to maximize their potentials, give a level playing ground to contribute to and function in the society.

In addition, political security can be promoted through literacy provision because it can raise individual awareness on political matters, ensure citizens' active participation in matters bordering the society, equip the citizens with the wherewithal to resist political exploitation and educate them on the need to shun political violence. Literacy also promotes socio-economic security as it equips individuals with the requisite financial skills for economic ventures and problem solving skills for socio-economic development necessary for wealth creation and income generation (self-reliance). A nation whose citizens are financially secure will surely be protected from all forms of violence, troubles and fight – guaranteeing security.

Conclusion

This study has teased out the undeniable roles of literacy in addressing national security challenges. Literacy provisions can bring about human, political and socio-economic security as it enables access to social justice because peaceful co-existence engenders inclusiveness in national issues and open doors of opportunities to every individual to maximize his/her potentials in the society. The study concludes that if literary provision should be open to all citizens, it will promote the security of lives and property as it equips the citizens with the requisite financial, knowledge, survival, problem solving, human relations, entrepreneurial skills and understanding necessary for peaceful living. To this end, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Going to school should be made compulsory for all. Primary and secondary education should be a right to all citizens of the country.
2. Children must be in school until the age of 18. Penalties should be put in place for defaulters.
3. The government should invest in the provision of education to its citizens. Nigeria should fund education properly. The UNESCO requirement of allocating 26 percent of the total budget to education should be adhered to if more cannot be done.
4. The government should divert the money expended on maintaining security through the forces to provide things that cause insecurity as unemployment, hunger and illiteracy.

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