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ASSIGNMENT: You were taught that in writing an academic essay, you should start with the perception of a problem. Perceive a problem in your present environment, formulate a researchable topic for it, and await further instructions in our class on Thursday by 10 am.

TOPIC: ILLITERACY IN NIGERIA

### ILLITERACY IN NIGERIA

Throughout the past and recent years, illiteracy has been a problem that affects humans in the Nigerian society, due to lack of knowledge and development that these people lack. Illiteracy can be seen as the inability to read and write or the lack of knowledge in a particular subject; ignorance. It is a problem faced all over the world but especially in third-world countries such as Nigeria. Most especially, illiteracy is a subtle cause of human suffering in Nigeria. Illiteracy has been not just a personal lack but a societal one which brings down the economic, political, social and moral standards of that society.

The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education (NMEC), said recently that 35 per cent of the nation's adult population was illiterate, and it had remained high because efforts being made to address the situation has never yielded the expected result. Considering the funds and efforts that the country has devoted to various mass literacy programmes, including the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme that was launched with fanfare about 44 years ago in 1976, it is indeed worrisome that as high as 33 per cent of the nation's population is still wallowing in illiteracy. According to NMEC, literacy rate is the percentage of people from the age of 15 and above who can read and write simple statements in their everyday life. NMEC therefore considers it 'shameful' that in the 21st century, a country could have that large number of illiterates. More worrisome is that the authorities are not doing enough to address the situation.

The truth is that the high rate of illiteracy partly accounts for the low level of development in Nigeria. This is because the growth and development of any nation

depend largely on the quantity and quality of all segments of its population. And it is not as if the government is not doing anything. Over the years there have been serious efforts to boost literacy level, with the setting up of strategic institutions, commissions and centres for learning across the nation. But while some states indeed have worked hard to raise the literacy level among its population by ensuring that the dedicated centres are functional and that the target persons are aware of their existence, others have merely paid lip service to the burden. Nevertheless, the aim of such institutions, agencies and centres are sometimes misunderstood because many of them have veered from their responsibilities to the detriment of functional literacy population. This is one of the causes of illiteracy in Nigeria.

Other causes of illiteracy in Nigeria include: problems in primary education (low enrolment rates, high dropout rates, inadequate facilities, poor teaching/learning materials, irrelevant curriculum), poor enrolment rates in adult literacy programmes, high dropout rates linked both to economic problems which force adult learners to abandon classes in favour of income-generating activities and to problems relating directly to the adult literacy programme such as lack of relevance, funding issues and low morale among adult literacy instructors, literacy instructors not properly trained in facilitation skills and gender awareness, the exclusion of women from adult education programmes (this is still done in some northern countries), poor access to adult education for it is "hard" to reach communities, such people include nomads, fishermen and pastoralists, failure to sustain literacy rates due to poor resources, including equipment, material and teachers, donor dependency and a negative perceived value of education, and finally a poor literate environment that means that literacy skills are not maintained in the long term. These are all significant causes of illiteracy. I will go on to explain poverty as a cause of illiteracy. We should note that poverty is both a cause and result of illiteracy. There is both individual poverty and poverty of the country (national poverty). Nigeria, due to the country being almost poverty stricken, does not pour enough funds into the educational sector. Literacy is so critical to national development that it should, perhaps, be considered only as next to health. Nigerian government is simply not doing enough in the funding of education compared to countries like United Kingdom, Finland and Singapore. Individual poverty then entails that some Nigerian citizens are too poor to go to school. The adults cannot send their children to school due to their own illiteracy and insufficient funds.

The solutions to all these are pretty simply. With proper funding in addition to making education compulsory, there is some assurance that Nigeria's literacy rate will improve in the future. Education should definitely be made compulsory so that there

will be no exceptions as to who will be a literate. The following suggestions can also be offered. First of all, definition of literacy. In Nigeria, we continue to operate within a narrow definition of literacy, which sees it merely as the ability to read, write and calculate. This is no longer adequate for people to operate successfully in a scientific and technological age. Literacy is not just about adapting to existing conditions but about having the problem solving and critical-thinking skills necessary to bring about any changes needed. Secondly, the activities of the various organizations and agencies working towards adult literacy should be stream lined in order to make optimum use of meagre resources and minimize unnecessary squabbles and rivalries. Thirdly, a national assessment of literacy levels and practices is essential if Nigeria is to present a realistic account of its Universal Basic Education achievement in the nearer future. Lastly, there is a need to recruit and train competent adult education personnel who will be motivated to support policies and programmes on adult education throughout the country. And The Federal Government should as a matter of urgency set the machinery in motion to institute another mass literacy campaign that will be effectively carried out.

This is definitely not all there is to say on the broad topic that is illiteracy in Nigeria. But if all these solutions are taken into consideration and effectively applied in all the states of Nigeria, we can definitely hope for a brighter future. A future of massive national development and satisfactory living.