

Do We Require Adult Literacy?

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Abstract

Literacy has been considered as a fundamental human right and to be literate is one of the fundamental rights in the Indian constitution. Literacy is not only about the ability to read, write and do a simple calculation. but, it should be a problem-solving with the intention of helping one's own self and develop one's abilities. It is a tool for individual empowerment as well as a means for social development. Literacy is at the heart of basic education for all, and essential for eradicating all kinds of individual and societal problems relating to poverty, health, overpopulation, gender inequality, sustainable development, peace, democracy and so on so forth. Although, India has the highest population of illiterate adults, 287 million, 37% of the total population of such people across the world, according to UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring report. People often think that adult doesn't need to be literate as they are old enough. Due to such concepts, Adult literacy is a big challenge of our times. Adult literacy is therefore, an impelling need, that would enable adults to acquire skill and knowledge to properly fit into the new pattern of changing life and situations which are fast moving materially. Some significant outcome of adult literacy were: adult literacy improve health condition of the family, improve the environment, helps in obtaining vocational skills, rising strong literacy skills in family, control mental disability leading to crime, increase employment opportunity, etc. so, it can be concluded that adult literacy plays a big role in shaping our society as well as individual life. For the improvement of adult literacy the government of India has been engaged with number of adult literacy programme from time to time, and such effort is very much required to make the nation a hub for man power resource.

KEYWORDS: Literacy, Adult Literacy, Adult Education

1.0: Introduction:

Literacy has been considered as a fundamental human right and to be literate is also one of the fundamental rights in the Indian constitution. Earlier the word 'literate' means to be 'familiar with literature' or, more usually, 'well educated or learned'. It was only in the late nineteenth century that the concept has acquired a different meaning. Literacy means acquaintance with the alphabet and ability to read and write. UNESCO has further liberalized the concept of literacy and its objectives have been stated in a more comprehensive form - "Literacy is to help men and women to live fuller lives in adjustment to the changing environment, to develop the best elements in their culture, and to achieve social and economic progress, which will enable them to take their place in the modern world, and to live together in peace". Another definition emanating from the meeting in 2003 organized by the Basic Education Sector of The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) almost follows the

traditional concept of functional literacy - “Literacy is the capability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials linked with varying contents. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling the individual to attain his or her goals, build up his or her knowledge and potentials, and contribute fully to the community and wider society”.

According to Donald Block, "today literacy is far more than the ability to sound out a few words of one syllable". "It focuses not on recognising basic words but on comprehension of the world around us". As society and technology are rapidly innovating, people need to have the fundamental level of literacy for a meaningful existence in society. With this fundamental level of literacy, people can progress and live with less difficulty in society; it will also boost their skills in becoming more effective human beings.

Literacy, therefore, is not only about the ability to read, write and do a simple calculation. At the same time, it should be problem-solving with the intention of helping one’s own self and develop one’s abilities. It is a tool for individual empowerment as well as a means for social development. In reality, literacy is at the heart of basic education for all, and essential for eradicating all kinds of individual and societal problems relating to poverty, health, overpopulation, gender inequality, sustainable development, peace, democracy and so on so forth. Basic Literacy equips pupils with literacy skills for life-long education and promotes further learning. Literate societies are better geared to meet pressing problems and ensure better growth and development.

1.1: Literacy in India:

The United Nations declared 1990 to be the International Literacy year, but still there are 796 million persons across the world exclusive of having basic literacy skills, over a third of who are in India. India has the biggest population of illiterate adults at 287 million; Females are generally in excess of displayed within these inhabitants by two to one in comparison with men (UNESCO, 2011). Providing literacy to each and everyone in a nation like India and that is also the most populous in the world is by no means easy. The latest figures from the census of India 2011 saws that India is presently having 74.04% literacy rate in overall from 12% at the end of British rule in 1947. Even though this was a great improvement, the level is well below the world average literacy rate of 84%, and among all nations, India currently has the largest number of illiterate population. In spite of all the government programmes implemented for imparting literacy, India's literacy rate increased only "indolently,". The table given below shows the literacy rate of India since 1951-2011.

Table 1.1: India Literacy rate since 1951-2011

| Census year | Persons | Males | Females | Male-Females Literacy Gap |
|-------------|---------|-------|---------|---------------------------|
| 1951 | 18.33 | 27.16 | 8.86 | 18.30 |
| 1961 | 28.30 | 40.40 | 15.35 | 25.05 |
| 1971 | 34.45 | 45.96 | 21.97 | 23.98 |
| 1981 | 43.57 | 56.38 | 29.76 | 26.62 |
| 1991 | 52.21 | 64.13 | 39.29 | 24.84 |

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|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 2001 | 64.83 | 75.26 | 53.67 | 21.59 |
| 2011 | 74.04 | 82.14 | 65.46 | 16.68 |

Sources: Census 2011: Provisional Population Total - INDIA

The above table no. 1.1 shows that the literacy level of India has a growth of approximately 10% in each census. In the year 1951 the literacy rate was only 18.33% and in the current census 2011 literacy has grown to 74% which is not so satisfactory in today's present context. It is an outcome of 60-year efforts Indian government gave in the field of literacy. And unfortunately, the another drawback of the literacy system is that there is no great development in the area of Male-females gap in literacy rate in India, in the year 1951 the male-female gap was 18.30% and still in the recent census 2011 the male-female gap was 16.68%.

Regarding Adult Literacy, India has the highest population of illiterate adults, 287 million, 37% of the total population of such people across the world, according to UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring report. According to "The Economic Times (30 Jun 2015)", Adult literacy (age 15 years and above) rate in India was around 71%. For adults also, the literacy rate in rural areas was lower than that in urban areas. In rural areas, the adult literacy rate was 64% compared to 84% in urban areas.

1.2: Importance of Adult Literacy:

Literacy is the foundation for a more humane world, to improve the standard of living and quality of life of the people. People often think that adult doesn't need to be literate as they are old enough. Due to such concepts, Adult literacy is a big challenge of our times. The rapidity and vastness of scientific and technological changes have brought about a transformation of our life pattern and weakened all traditional modes and values. New modes, new relations and new values are replacing the old ones. In the alarming realities of world situation, it is not an over statement at all that the future of mankind hinges on education. Adult literacy and education is therefore, an impelling need, that would enable people to acquire skill and knowledge to properly fit into the new pattern of changing life and situations which are fast moving materially. Morally, socially and politically, illiterates are required to transform their lives to take intelligent interest in the affairs of the world. Literacy is no longer the close preserve of the chosen few. It is one of man's fundamental rights. Some of the fundamental aspects where literacy helps adults are:

1.2.1: Adult Literacy and Health: Human beings are living in a very fast changing and competitive world. And to cope up with these changes we need to stay healthy and fit. In other words, people achieve a better quality of life when life is balanced. The balance here includes physical, mental and social needs. All these achievements are possible only when one is in good health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "Health is a state of complete physical, psychological, and social well-being and not simply the absence of disease or infirmity." And another romantic definition by Freud is: "Health is the ability to work and to love." It is a level of functional efficiency of living

beings and a general condition of a person's body, mind and spirit, free from illness, injury and pain. It is a source of confidence in everyday life and positive outlook. There is an old saying: 'Health is Wealth'. Thus, it is very important for each and every individual to stay healthy for proper growth and development of their mind and body. Similarly, Adults also needs to stay healthy because as the person gets older his physical mental ability starts dwindling. So, older adults are at high risk for developing chronic illnesses and related disabilities.

Considering the importance of good health various attempts were made to improve health among adults. Lesley Bartlett in her paper, "International Literacy Day: Recommitting Ourselves to Literacy for All" mentioned that, "Literacy is the great enabler," it correlates with other vital capabilities. Studies suggest that Low literacy is a pervasive and under-recognised problem in health care. A sizeable population in this world is functionally illiterate, and many more have marginal literacy skills. Such patients may have difficulty reading and understanding discharge instructions, medication labels, patient education materials, consent forms, or health surveys. Properly assessing the literacy level of individual patients or groups may avoid problems in clinical care and health practices (Terry, 2014). Higher levels of literacy will also correlate with safer health behaviours, such as accessing health services and use of condom to prevent the transmission of STD's. Secondly, it can communicate skills of lay people and professionals like doctors, nurses, pharmacies and so on, in calculating medicine doses for intake, reading disease prevention pamphlets and other instructions that can keep can keep themselves and their families healthy. However, millions of adults lack these essential "health literacy" skills, due to lack of literacy. In short literacy helps adults in guiding how they can prevent disease, at the same time it will help reduce the spread of Sexually Transmitted Diseases and another form of diseases. Health literacy for an adult capacitates individuals to obtain, process, and understand essential health information and services needed to make suitable health decisions.

1.2.2: Adult Literacy and Environment: Human beings are both the causative agents and victims of the changes that our environment is going through. Everybody speaks of the protection and preservation of environment. Global summits are organised to discuss environmental issues. In the last hundred years, the mutual rapport among environmentalists, social organizations and culture have been analysed and discussed in different fields like anthropology, sociology and geography. All this shows the increasing importance of environment. Above and beyond, it is a reality that life is united with the environment. Humans and their surroundings are integrated. (Puja, 2012)

Every Living being is bounded by materials and forces that make up its environment. Environment is from where every living being derive its requirement like food and shelter. A favorable condition for the existence and development of living organisms is created by the environment. Mahatma Gandhi said, "The earth provides enough to satisfy everyman's needs, but not everyman's greed". The environment and humankind relationship is indeed deep and it has been recognized ever since the Vedic period. The environmental degradation has become a severe problem for the survival of human beings. Pollution of soil, water and air causes harm to living organisms as well as loss to priceless natural resources.

It is therefore, important for everyone to understand the environment in which they live; and the surroundings where they work. But it is not so easy for an illiterate adult to understand it, and practice accordingly to environmental principles. The sky-scraping level of poverty and illiteracy is directly associated to the current level of environmental pollution and degradation. The poor and the illiterate are a lot more interested in issues related to their everyday survival than environmental management; this lack of interest and awareness often lead to more irresponsible environmental behavior which in turn brings environmental problems and leads to a vicious cycle of poverty (Addison and Kofi, 2009). Knowledge of the environment is only possible when one is literate. A literate adult is expected to know: (i). Environmental problems and their causes. (ii) Skills to take on in social activism to combat such problems. (iii) Attitude of respect and correlation to the natural world (iv) Desire to change current practices to care for the Earth. It is therefore imperative that in order to save our environment, literacy is a vital instrument.

1.2.3: Adult Literacy and Vocational Skills: Literacy has always been regarded as an important ingredient for socio-economic growth. Development of a country depends on the availability of both economic resources as well as human capital. Nowadays, the world is looking is engaged in developing the human capital as it is the only resource left without any limitation. All other form of resources has its limitations in the sense that human brain does not have a limitation, they invent and discover new thing and provide themselves with a better life. The working capacity of the labour force can be enhanced by raising the literacy rate and vocational skills simultaneously. In order to get a job in the market, literacy with skill is a must in today's competitive world. There is continued demand for skills among the adults. So, the entrance of vocational skills in the educational system becomes an important link to develop the capacities of individuals. Skill development extends structured apprenticeships and other enterprise-based training. Skill development is the process of identifying a person skill's gap, developing the required skill and honing these skills. When a person is skilled, it will determine the proper execution of plans and projects or any kind of an enterprise.

Studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between literacy and skill acquisition as those who were literate performed better than illiterates. (Adedokun et al., 2013). A review conducted on policy study in the early 1990s by the World Bank, provides an additional positive assessment in the field of vocational and technical education. Various evaluations in advanced countries show that vocational studies under the right conditions can produce positive rates of return which are favorable to those of general education. Further, it also shows that technical and vocational education is more helpful when the focused is on skills demand in the market. In support of these statements, studies conducted by Ziderman and Neuman (1999) shows that for technical and vocational education graduates, jobs placement is more available allowing them to use the skills they acquired. For the disadvantaged groups in the society, vocational education is more effective, when they are imparted together with basic Literacy. (Arvil, 2012)

Literacy, therefore, plays a key role in the development of proper vocational skills for the individual adults as well as for the country. Japan can be an example where an economy has developed by excelling in human resources and the skills they acquire despite the deficiency of natural resource. Effective utilisation of the human resource by providing literacy and proper skills becomes very vital for the country's development and thus, literacy plays a key role in determining the growth and development of an individual and the nation as a whole.

1.2.4: Adult Literacy and Rising Strong Literacy Skills in Family: Adult's literacy plays a vital role in raising the literacy skills in a family. Studies have shown that in developing countries educated mothers are more likely to send their children to school than non-educated mother. In real sense learning to read begins long before a child enters school in their families and surrounding. It begins when parents read to their children, buys their children books, and encourage their children to read. In a study, it is clearly shown that parents who are poor readers don't read as often to their children as do parents who are strong readers. As a result these children of low-literate parents enter school less prepared to learn to read than other children. Early reading experiences with their parents prepare children for the benefits of formal literacy instruction. Indeed, parental involvement in their child's reading has been found to be the most important determinant of language and emergent literacy (Bus et al., 1995; Evans and Waite, 2008; Frontline Consultants, 2006; Peters et al., 2003). Furthermore, parents who introduce their babies to books give them a head start in school and an advantage over their peers all the way through primary school (Wade & Moore, 2000).

1.2.5: Adult Literacy and Employment Opportunity: Literacy and numeracy have a direct impact on employment, career opportunities and progression. For e.g. Understanding of safety regulations and procedures leads to fewer injuries among literate workers, literacy raises the level of self-confidence, get hold of new skills, better prepared to seek promotion opportunities, and believe that they are esteemed by their workplaces. A literate workforce boosts productivity: The C. D. Howe Institute reports that a 1% rise in a country's literacy level, relative to the international average, is associated with an eventual 2.5% rise in labour productivity and a 1.5% rise in the per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This 1% increase in literacy rates would boost the national income by as much as \$32 billion (Serge Coulombe and Jean-François Tremblay, 2005). A similar finding was given in studies carried out by BIS (2011); Metcalf et al. (2009); Bynner and Parsons (2006), and Machin (2001). And above all this, working in a team means that employees must be able to communicate clearly with one another. Because of all these positive points, literacy becomes a must for employment.

1.2.6: Adult Literacy and Mental Disability leading to Crime: There is a clear correlation between adult illiteracy and crime. Daily life is harder for people with low literacy, so they are more likely to feel frustrated and dissatisfied. Usually, People with low literacy skills have poor problem solving skills. People who have low literacy skills are likely to be less active citizens than other people. They are less prone to get involved in community activities like sports, school groups, church groups, and so on. As a result, they often feel isolated and vulnerable, and many of them think like outcasts. Some

studies show that Literacy has a positive impact on better mental and physical health (Metcalf et al., 2009); and more positive attitudes towards life (Terry, 2006). Further, from a prison service study in the UK (1998), in which prisoners were asked to take a literacy test devised by the Basic Skills Agency. The test was approximately the same to the reading skills likely of 9 to 10 year olds. The results showed that 60% had problems with literacy, and 40% had severe literacy problems. Likewise, the Social Exclusion Unit reported that 80% of prisoners have writing skills at or below the level expected of an 11-year-old child; the equivalent figure for reading is 50% (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Here we can see that greater part of the prisoners was almost illiterate and illiteracy is one big reason for their current situation. This may partly explain why people who have low literacy are statistically more likely to be involved in crime either as the offender or the victim.

1.2.7 Adult Literacy and Human Rights Abuse: People must be aware of their rights in order to assert them. Literacy gives people way into that information. Photo Gunter Reitz quoted “An illiterate is unaware of the law which could protect him, for example, of the guarantees provided for in the Universal Declaration in matters relating to policing and justice, marriage, work, participation in and supervision of the management of public affairs. He is completely at the mercy of others. . . .”. In a paper presented by the UNESCO Secretariat at the world assembly for human rights held in Montreal, 22-27 March 1968. It states that “Not only is illiteracy a violation of the right to education: it is one of the major obstacles to the effective enjoyment of the other Human rights. For more than 700 million illiterates, and also for some 250 million semi-literates”, the article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10th December 1948 to the effect that everyone with no distinction of any kind is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the declaration remains a futile hope. So, Literacy plays a significant role in reducing gender differences, race, and religious inequality that favours one group over another in access to education, property, employment, health care, legal, and civic participation.

Bearing in mind all the above points related to literacy and its association with various social, environmental and health issues. Literacy is no doubt the most powerful tool to overcome those entire hurdles which come in between the human being and its development. We humans need literacy in all aspects of life; it is the best friend of we humans. It will give us the ocean of knowledge in all the field of knowledge without any bias. So, adult seriously requires the acquisition of literacy skills to up bring their life and develop a healthy social environment.

1.3: Adult Education:

The concept of Adult Education is broad; over and above its purpose is so comprehensive that it does not basically provide itself an agreeable definition. The task of defining adult education will be additionally composite in the way that it is applied to various activities guided towards promotion of awareness, understanding and learning between the adults in multiple situations. In order to comprehend the concept of adult education, first it will be appropriate to understand the meaning of ‘adult’. Primarily, adulthood is conceived as

one of the stages in the process of human development and growth. (Boring et al., 1956) As per the chorological age of the individuals, the phase of adulthood is perceived in a different way by various previous studies. Reviewing the circumstances of educational development in India, the Sergeant Committee (1944) considered adult as those who are under the age group of 10 to 35 years. And on the basis of the Saxena Report (1948), in India the Central Advisory Board of Education recommended that social educations are to be imparted to adults in the age group of 12 to 45 years. Further in succeeding stage, the upper age limit for adults was reduced to 40 years by the Provincial Education Officers. But for the purposes of adult education The Education Commission (1964-66) considered people in the age group of 15 to 45 years as adults. (Rao,1988)

Divergent to the prior understandings, which considered adult as people in the age group of 10 to 45 years, in India the National Adult Education Programme aimed at imparting literacy among the 10 crores of illiterate adult population in the age group of 15 to 35 years. Unfolding the reasons for this, Rajkumari Chandrasekhar (1982) states:

The reasons for giving uppermost priority to this specific age group are two-fold: (i). this is the most productive age group; (ii). Almost 50% of the illiterate populations in India fall under this age group. Although there was a substantial debate on the age differentials for recognising a person as adult in the adult literacy programmes in India, the 3rd International Conference on Adult Education sponsored by UNESCO deleted importance to the age of the individual and recommended that a person needs adult education, provided he is a dropout or an illiterate. A close observation of this statement reveals that for generic purpose adult education aims at imparting education for the illiterate or dropouts and particularly for those who are in the ages between 15 to 35 years. (Rao, 1988)

Often, the concept of 'Education' is misunderstood as equivalent to literacy. Literacy is only one of the areas of education and further it's a tool to promote education. In reality, education is the process through which the faculty of reasoning is developed among the human beings, in order to make them able to distinguish between right and wrong (Madan, 1975). Consequently, UNESCO has listed the following goals for education:

- Education enables person to live a fuller, meaningful and happier life;
- Education develops the best elements in the human culture;
- Education promotes social and economic wellbeing of the people; and
- The ultimate aim of education is to make possible the mankind to lead a peaceful life

Keeping in view all the above points, collectively adult education has been conceptualised as those programme which educates the illiterate adult. There is widespread diversity with the use of Adult Education and in addition together with minimal meaning, includes delivering basic education for adults. The term Non-Formal Education has lately been adopted by a number of countries reflecting the alteration in actual policy priorities and programmes. In India, the term Adult Education and Non-Formal Education are broadly used. Besides, Adult Education is understood as a part of the Non-Formal Education.

Stressing to the same point, Liveright and Maygood described adult education as: “a process whereby persons, who no longer attended school on a regular and full time basis, undertake sequential and organized activities with a conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, understanding or skills, appreciation and attitude or for the purpose of identifying and solving personal or community problems” (Liveright and Maygood, 1968).

Adult Education in its very broad term, is based on the concept of education as a lifelong process which is ascertained by International Education Commission in its report entitled “Learning to be” in 1972. The first International Conference on adult education held in Denmark in 1949 (The Elsinore Conference), stated that adult education has the task of satisfying the needs and aspirants of adults in all their university.

According to UNESCO “The term, Adult Education denotes the entire body of organised educational processes, whatever content level and method, whether content level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge improve their technical or professional qualifications and bring about changes in their attitude or behavior in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic, and cultural development. Adult education embraces all forms of educative experiences needed by men and women according to their varied interests and requirements, as their differing levels of comprehension and ability and in their changing roles and responsibilities throughout their life”. The above definition gives a total picture of adult education, in all respect.

In Indian context, the concept of ‘Adult Education’ is generally applied for all those programmes which aim at educating the adult illiterates. Stressing this, Nikhil Ranjan Roy (1967) describes Adult Education as: “ ... the most common, and universally used form of expression. By implication, it means imparting education to those who at their educable age could not or did not go in for formal schooling”. Saiyeden (2004) describes “Adult Education includes political and civil as well moral education”. What was called Adult Education before independence is today called social education. But the aims of social education are more comprehensive than those of adult education. Its main aim is to bring a socialistic pattern of society through education.

All the definitions on Adult Education are somehow similar to one another; the only thing is that the educationist or the experts link Adult education to different dimensions of life of common man which he requires to living a fruitful life. Adult education has got some unique features in itself when the task on learning comes for adult only. It has its own way, some of the main features about adult learner which gives shape in their learning:

- Adult only learns what is of their interest. Unlike children they can't be forced to learn what an instructor wish to. So, recognizing the interest of adult is a must,

before developing the teaching-learning materials of an Adult Education Programme.

- Adult takes active interest in their learning
- For learning new skills adult uses personal life experience.
- Adults changes behaviour in response to various pressures, both internal and external
- An adult learns best when the environment is acceptable, safe, challenging and supportive.
- Adult learners improve are more interested in improving their social and economic status
- Sometime adults shy away from learning due of embarrassment and not because of lack of interest

1.4: Conclusion: Educating adult is not an easy task. It is important to understand the mental and psychological condition of the adults before imparting literacy among them. In Adult Education system there is no teacher, no students, what exist is only 'learner'. Everyone learns something from one another. To bring equality in society adult education is a must. Some of the land mark adult education programme Indian government had taken up to improve the adult literacy level were as: Gram Shikshan Mohim(1959), Farmers' Functional Literacy Project (1967-68), National Adult Education Programme (1978), Rural Functional Literacy Programme (1978), National Literacy Mission (1988), Saakshar Bharat Mission(2009), etc. the most recent one is Saakshar Bharat, it is centrally sponsored nation-wide literacy scheme of the Indian Department for School Education and Literacy (DSEL) giving more emphasis on rising women's literacy in India. It was launched by the prime minister on International Literacy Day in September 2009. Its aim is to considerably reduce the number of non-literate adults in India and promote an environment within communities which would encourage lifelong learning. Further, such adult education programmes are required in India to make the country a hub for man power resource.

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