

Evaluation of the impact of literacy education



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Today, 29, 000 children under the age of five will die because of an avoidable epidemic or disease. Every 15 seconds, another child in Africa becomes another AIDS orphan. Far too often children are left parentless, or dead because of a costly dilemma that could be avoided through health education. Many people hear the word literacy and assume that reading and writing defines this skill. Reading and writing are not the only defining points of literacy, but rather literacy defines our day to day lives. Oxford dictionary addresses literacy as “ competency or knowledge in a specific area” (Oxford Dictionary, 1). Competency in any area of life both simplifies and improves the quality of human life. Forms of literacy are very broad; they are seen in day to day life but rarely understood as such. Types of literacy implemented in day to day life may be exemplified by skills, such as driving; an overlooked aspect of life that offers a flexible form of transportation. These skills that both simplify our lives and provide sustenance for life, require basic literacy; a skillset that is very broad, including: driving, reading and writing, or common cleanliness—all of which are necessary for a functional, simplified and an orderly society.

Literacy as defined by Talmadge C. Guy, a graduate from the University of Georgia, an author who has written multiple books pertaining to adult literacy, as well as education and its effects on our society, defines literacy as having no definite definition, but rather “ many overlapping meanings” (The adult literacy education system in the United States 3). Literacy has evolved over the years, reaching a point where people question its value by simply confining it to a commonly misunderstood definition of reading and writing. Literacy goes far beyond this simple understanding and has the

ability to grant life or death. The addressment of literacy and labeling of it as an under, understood skillset begs the question: which forms of literacy will be applicable in the future with development of technology, and how it effects day to day life?

Literacy is not the simple stereotype, ' you can or can't read' but instead a " complex mix of variables." (The social context of literacy 2) Some of these variables include fluidity in areas such as typing, a skill much needed in our modern world, or the skill of operating a simple saw in an industrial setting. Many subjects not necessarily pertaining to reading and writing, such as coding and decoding, or simple computer skills are often disregarded despite their necessary aspect in day to day life. Guy believes that literacy is the ability to fluidly deal with daily issues, tasks and projects provided through education. Cleansing the readers mind of all other ideas and interpretations, he closes paragraph six saying, " Literacy in this latter sense is outside the scope of this paper" thus dividing reading and writing from the definition of literacy, forcing a reader to question if they are in fact illiterate themselves (The Social Context of Literacy 4).

Many people view illiteracy as a crippling limitation as well as a social barrier. In many cases, it is. Lack of education has not only driven people further from the reality, that a greater education could increase their standard of living; but have created a circle of life where it is underappreciated and overlooked. Adult literacy education is a proposed plan to deal with the dilemma of computation and literacy problems among adults in America. In an attempt to broaden his readers understanding, Talmadge C. Guy, in a paper commissioned to the EFA reveals several <https://assignbuster.com/evaluation-of-the-impact-of-literacy-education/>

statistics, saying, “ somewhere between one in five and one in three adult Americans...” show some sort of difficulty in “...reading or computation” (The adult literacy education system in the United States 2). Expanding on these statistics, he says that many people may read these as staggering—or even impossible. Yet there also remains the inequality between minorities such as African Americans, Hispanics, the poor, and the un-educated.

Furthermore, according to nearly all statistics, these minorities are financially sitting below the predominant white community. Accordingly, Guy cultivates the idea that minorities experience roadblocks from proper education. But, since education does not determine literacy, does this mean that these ‘ minorities’ could be far more literate than the ‘ highly educated’ people of our society? This type of ‘ competency’ based literacy has been appropriately defined by Kenneth Levine as “ the possession of, or access to, the 6 competencies and information required to accomplish transactions entailing reading and writing” but, he does not confine literacy to reading and writing alone (The Social Context of Literacy 34). These ‘ 6 competencies’ are not listed in the reading, but rather found cited from his writings in the *Harvard Business Review* as: “ Ethics and safety, organization, communication, efficient learning, promoting growth, and connection or belonging in a setting.” (Harvard UP) These six competencies are, in essence the foundations of a functional, simplified orderly society.

Questioning the modern-day educational system, Guy states that education is both ideological and cultural—providing people with meaning and rank, as well as a position in the social ladder. In the ideological sense, it is simply a manifestation of a person’s interests, giving purpose and meaning. These

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aspects of life provide for elements of which are necessary sustenance, often revolving around a career—which often defines a person’s social status. In the same way, Guy makes the point that literacy is far more than reading a book; but it is also the ability to function both fluently and effectively in society—an ability that is statistically increased with education.

Encompassing the minds of many Americans, remains the fallacy that education determines literacy. I argue differently. Education does not determine literacy but is a preventative measure that can be taken in an attempt to subdue it.

Alan Luke and John Elkins debate several potent questions in a short research paper titled “ Reinventing Literacy in ‘ New Times’.” These two writers have degrees in both Education and Social Sciences. Putting their knowledge to paper, the second paragraph of their book asks, “ what will it [as the use of literature and such evolve] mean to be a reader and writer in the 21st century”? (Reinventing Literacy in ‘ New Times’ 4) In the following pages, these authors question the use of literacy in the form of literature as opposed to literacy in the form of day to day life. First discussed, is the potency of education in history. Luke and Elkins argue that many people did not attend simple schooling, such as middle or high school and even fewer attended a post-secondary school. The demand for education has evolved from upper class men, to lower class people, creating an equalization in opportunities for both ethnic minorities as well as women. Developments were not only noticed in the broadening of sex and cultural backgrounds but also in the texts used to teach literature. To expand, standardized testing was introduced in the school system, which brought about not only a change

in schooling, but also a change in the knowledge required to be a part of a specific work place. With this change in the form of learning, Luke and Elkins say, “ so did the practices of literacy, our attitudes and beliefs about the power and value of literacy and indeed our assumptions about how literacy is best learned and taught” (Reinventing Literacy in ‘ New Times’ 5).

Furthermore, they state that the change in overall production and distribution of literature will evolve, but under no circumstances will the need for basic reading and writing skills change.

With modern technology like TV’s or cell phones, the need for reading and writing diminishes but is not obsolete. For example, text messages require both a knowledge of letters as well as the ability to read. In their research paper, Luke and Elkins call these advancements that also use old fashioned communication the “ Hybrid effect” (Reinventing Literacy in ‘ New Times’ 5). Technology does not just use classical reading and writing, but incorporates: fiction, poetry, journalism and drama. Literacy is not outdated, but the definition and forms of literacy that exist have evolved and new forms need to be learned. But how does the modernization of literacy affect the modern world?

Ilona S. Kickbusch defines literacy in yet another form. She has a PhD in Political Sciences, earned from the University of Konstanz as well as substantial practical experience working in underdeveloped countries. She has worked for the World Health organization, from there she became the leader of Global Health promotion. Now, a professor of public health and world health at Yale university, she continues to study how the standards of living in impoverished countries can be positively impacted.

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During her studies, Kickbusch became convinced that there is a direct connection between education and literacy. Not only does she see a direct correlation between education and literacy but also, “ Education and literacy... as key determinants of health...” (Addressing the Health and Literacy Divide Ch. 2). Her interests in the connection between education and literacy has been fueled by her fight against HIV and Aids—which tends to be more predominant in impoverished, under educated communities.

Health Canada says,

: ...literacy levels, which are usually, but not always, related to levels of education, are important predictors of employment, active participation in the community and health status. They are also important predictors of the success of a nation.

(Health Canada, 1999)

Furthermore, the benefits of education cannot be weighed. Crime rate, as well as unemployment rate and many other factors contributing to a less desirable standard of life, can be combatted through the implementation of education; as noted earlier. Kickbusch makes a direct correlation between literacy rate and geographic areas of: disease, infant mortality, life expectancy, and above all else, most significantly- economic growth. In contrast, she questions; why do more developed African countries struggle with HIV and AIDS? This is where the distinction between health literacy and being able to read and write becomes vivid. She proposes several scientific studies attaining to the benefits of health literacy and “ health interventions” (Health literacy: addressing the health and education divide, Ch. 2). These

interventions could play a key role in controlling and possibly eliminating many deadly health risks in developing countries.

Literacy does not only simplify your life, it can also save lives... and money. A lack of health education is not only detrimental to overall societal health, but it is costly. CNN states that in total, “ the effect of low health literacy costs the US health care system between \$106 billion and \$238 billion each year” (CNN 1). The cost of illiteracy in this area, paired with a lessened standard of life begs the question; why this issue has not been addressed more emphatically and why it persists in our society.

Save the Children, a non-profit organization, providing relief for children living in a poverty-stricken area states, “ Far too often, even the simplest and most affordable health-promoting and lifesaving interventions - like immunizations, vitamin supplements, safe drinking water, and prenatal check-ups - fail to reach them.” referring to countries where people are unable to provide for themselves and are forced to reside in either slums or impoverished communities (Save the People 2).

The risks of not addressing health literacy in a society such as today's, where travel is unrestrained, to those of privilege—where borders are over-run with hundreds of thousands with a lower societal and economic status—education must be improved. Kickbusch states that education plays directly into the success of developing nations. She also argues that education of the wrong nature, not pertaining directly to the needs of the nation is useless. Rather education that is globally necessary—yet tailored to each specific society, needs to be promoted. Her ideas to control the situation and

understand variables are necessary for the success and growth of under developed nations.

To understand literacy to the fullest, it first must be recognized as it is. Literacy must be more accurately defined as education or competency. Health literacy has been established as both costly as well as hazardous and an outlier in how it is overlooked. While literacy is completely misunderstood, it completes our society in ways impossible by any other means. By addressing this outlier, and educating people of its existence and effects, we can bring positive changes to human existence.

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