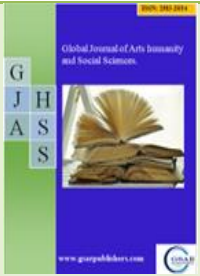
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LANGUAGE AND LITERACY CAMPAIGN AS A TOOL OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION, MODERN RUSSIA AND NIGERIA

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Abstract

Language and literacy initiatives have been core components of socio-cultural polities. The Russian state, in its varying metamorphosis, had deployed productive initiatives towards literacy campaigns, serving as a model especially after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. Significantly, it has been observed from available literature that developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, have the greater number of illiterates, especially in the modern world. Consequent upon this assertion, governments and countries that find themselves in this precarious situation devote a lot of revenue, resources, energy, infrastructure and political campaigns, and manpower toward the eradication of this social menace which is a hindrance to nation-building, national development, and state stability. This paper therefore investigates the desired and necessary campaign(s) against mass illiteracy in the former multilingual and multi-ethnic Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R), especially in the aftermath of the Socialist Revolution that reverberated all over the world because of its historical precedence. The historical method of research was used and the data were subjected to historical analysis. The study unwraps the unprecedented significance of the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917 that marked a basic change in world history, trend, and transformation, especially the Bolsheviks campaign against mass illiteracy, which redesigned the historical destiny of Russia and explicated the reality of the subject matter. Proceeding from this Revolution, the Bolsheviks deployed the campaigns of “down with illiteracy”, “let one literate teach one illiterate” and “workers of the world unite” as strategies of gaining popular support and furthermore enhancing social, economic, and political progress, nation building and national hegemony in the Soviet Union that consequently transformed into the present Russian Federation. Nigeria and other developing countries can draw lessons and gain from this approach in relation to eradicating mass illiteracy and consolidating on nation-building and state cohesion.

Keywords: Bolsheviks, Education System, USSR, Mass Illiteracy, Literacy Campaign, nation building, modern Russia, Nigeria, and State Cohesion.

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Research Methodology

The main thrust of this article is an investigation into language and literacy campaign as a tool of national development in the former Soviet Union, modern Russia, and Nigeria. It investigates the question of how the Bolsheviks deployed the Russian language and

literacy campaigns to revamp modern Russia in the aftermath of the socialist revolution of 1917. The article further espouses how developing countries place a high index premium on its human capital with the affirmation that mass literacy would enhance social, economic, educational, scientific progress, and a broad spectrum development.



The central idea of this study was analysed specifically in reference to Imperial Russia in its pre-1917 period, the U.S.S.R, up till its disintegration in 1991, and modern Russia till the present.

While putting this research together, the information deployed was purposively extracted from primary and secondary sources. These sources include published books, monographs, archival materials, and data from reputable and reliable sources, including veritable online Russian and Nigerian sources, provincial files, and articles from reputable journals.

This study used a historical research approach. It made use of an interpretive design, and the information collected were subjected to historical and content analysis. A content analysis was conducted of news articles, government, and official documents related especially to literacy in the former USSR, modern Russia, and Nigeria. This includes, but not limited to analysing media coverage, speeches, literacy drive campaigns, slogans and statements by the Bolsheviks, and official agreements between the former USSR and modern Russia. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with experts on Russian literacy policies vis a vis the former USSR and Nigeria. These interviews help to provide a deeper understanding and kernel of the motivations behind Russia's determination to make the Soviet Union one of the most literate societies in the world as a means of economic development and also to place her amongst the comity of great European nations. This initiative had positive implications.

We conducted surveys with ten adult Russian citizens in Russia, ten Russians in Nigeria, who had studied in the former Soviet Union, and fifteen Nigerian students who studied at the University of Ibadan, and University of Lagos respectively, totalling 35 people interviewed. To ensure a representative sample, we employed a stratified random sampling technique during the survey, which proved effective.

Our employment of stratified random sampling involved categorising those interviewed into distinct sub-groups. We ensured the diversity and representativeness of the sample by identifying key age and periodic factors such as the age of the people interviewed, their educational qualifications, and their perceptions of Russia, all of which are relevant to our study. This careful approach was applied to capture the three major historical afore-mentioned epochs of Modern Russia.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically to identify the motivations behind Russia's literacy drive and development.

Introduction

Language and literacy have been acknowledged to be salient, but inseparable integral parts of language in education parameters. Significantly, education is carried out via linguistic intelligibility, between the instructor and the learners, or among learners within a pedagogical setting. Within this context, therefore, the place of education in society cannot be overemphasized; neither can it be underestimated in socio-cultural polities. It has generally become an everyday slogan that education is the best legacy that an

individual can ever inherit. Thus, national development in socio-political settings is to a large extent, dependent on the nature of advancement that the education system in such polities has attained. Although education policies are indigenous, that is, socio-culturally oriented, formulated and implemented in a country, via the governmental orientation in such state towards advancement, international bodies, such as the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), have espoused varying degrees of efforts towards addressing some perceived shortcomings in education practices across the globe. These efforts are neither seen as imposition nor infringement on national sovereignty of member states but are made towards addressing core components which are crucial to global relevance. Thus, education is established as a right that is universally recognised, but to a great extent in some parts of the world, such as in Africa, still only partially guaranteed, for some reasons such as poverty, illiteracy, ill-literacy, and poor management of indigenous education system. It is against this backdrop that UNESCO acknowledges the fact that education is universally acknowledged to be a major factor of economic progress and a pre-condition of social change. This worldwide realisation has gone hand in hand with the remarkable expansion that education has enjoyed everywhere during the past twenty years.

The unprecedented expansion of education throughout the world has enabled tens of millions of individuals who would otherwise have been deprived of the opportunity, and indeed whole new sectors of the population, to gain access to knowledge, thereby raising the general level of education within our societies. The aforesaid then contributes to the creation of the essential bases for improving individual living conditions and promoting social, economic, and cultural progress. Thus, the expansion of education represents a major aspect of the thorough-going transformations which are taking place in the present-day world and is a phenomenon whose long-term impact will be considerable. In summary, it can be said that education is also a ballast of mirroring a country's advancement.

Conceptualizing Literacy Campaign

The concept of literacy campaign is a reoccurring phenomenon in Language in Education field of enquiry. It has been argued to be a concerted effort designed to reduce illiteracy among the populace in a geo-political setting (Bhola, 1982; Eklof, 1987). Very interesting to note is the fact that such endeavour is embarked upon with the sole aim of promoting mass literacy in a country. Being literate is a continuous process. Generally, the capacity to read, write, speak, and listen in a way that facilitates efficient communication and helps us make sense of the outside world is known as literacy. In the modern world, literacy has evolved from its traditional definition as a set of reading, writing, and counting skills to include identification, comprehension, interpretation, invention, and communication in a world that is becoming more digital, text-mediated, information-rich, and changing quickly. Along with technological expertise, media literacy, education for sustainability and global engagement, and job-specific abilities, literacy is an endless cycle of acquisition of knowledge and



mastery in reading, writing, and utilizing information throughout life. The skills of literacy are growing and changing as more and more people use digital technologies for information and education. Encouraging teachers with the research-backed literacy strategies that every student requires is the goal of the statewide mass literacy initiative. Although literacy initiative is generally all-encompassing, children will be on a path toward literacy for life if they get evidence-based instruction in classrooms and schools that support their language and cultural diversity. Apart from situating children within literacy initiative, adult literacy initiative is a conspicuous one (Muller, 1974; Lowe, 1975; Akinpelu, 1977). The main focus in adult literacy campaign is specifically directed towards control or sometimes, outright eradication of mass illiteracy amidst vast populace in a sociocultural polity (Muller, 1974). It has also been observed that the rate of literacy and the plethora of problems surrounding its eradication differs from country to country. This is perhaps what led John Lowe (1975:62), to aver that;

Until recently it was commonly supposed that adult illiteracy was a problem confined to the developing countries. Today it is clear that adult illiteracy is also a serious problem in most industrialised countries. Estimates indicate that in several highly prosperous countries, the illiteracy rate may be as high as 15 percent. Not only the poor and the unskilled are among the illiterates, but also skilled workers and not infrequently the rich and apparently successful

To this end therefore, "it is deducible that it is not that the Soviet population was uneducated: literacy was nearly universal and educational attainment levels were among the highest in the world" (Remington, T, 1999; 181)

In pursuant of our analysis on the scourge of illiteracy, we take on board a broad-based perspective. In this context, illiteracy is established as one of the major banes of the contemporary societal development. This effect could be seen in developing countries of the world. In these spheres, over 800 million individuals who live in developing countries especially, have come to be considered a veritable scourge of this menace. It is worthy to note also, that many industrialised countries are themselves not entirely spared in this problem. For instance, to some certain extent, a form of functional illiteracy is developing in some of such countries. This, therefore, already affects about 2 to 10 percent of their adult population. Although the level of illiteracy is not highly noticeable in a developed economy, developing nations are usually the main receivers of the banes that such has on socio-cultural polities. Thus, Odunuga, (1984: 235) adumbrates the scourge of illiteracy by stating that:

For decades the planners of education in developing countries have been struggling to re-structure their educational systems in order to meet their national needs. These educational programmes envisage such a change in the system that would bring about the cultural upliftment of their respective societies in order to usher

in new generations of people whose economic and social contributions would go a long way to improve the lot of the people themselves

It is substantiated further that literacy is not an end to itself. Rather, it is considered as a means to better conditions of life and that is why the campaigns for literacy continue unabated in countries with more illiterate populations (Odunuga, 1984).

An Overview of Language and Mass Literacy Initiative in the USSR

Veritable academic debates abound on literacy campaign in relation to Russia as a geo-political setting (Eklof, 1987; Clark, 2000; Martin, 2018). Research carried out over the years states that Russia has passed through varying degrees of metamorphosis, from the Russian Empire, Soviet Russia, and its present state as the Russian Federation, upon the disintegration of the USSR in 1991. Although the various stages is credited for its peculiarity, the place of mass literacy campaign is unprecedented in the early years of the USSR, through the viable efforts of charismatic leadership in Vladimir Lenin, the forerunner of the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917. Veritable academic debates abound on the literacy rate of the Russian state upon becoming a Socialist state in the aftermath of the October Revolution. From the perspective of what the early Soviet Russia devised towards making well-educated citizenry within the Soviet geographical coverage, it is established that what the Russian state, as well as her citizens, was learning was to read. As a result, reading politics, economics, and history was very pronounced. The main reason for this was the basic fact that the people wanted to know, and be properly portrayed in the new socio-cultural and socio-political settings. Thus, in every city, in most towns, along the Front, each political faction had its newspaper, at times, such news leaflets sometimes, possess several editorials. Hundreds of thousands of pamphlets were distributed by thousands of organisations, and poured into the armies, the villages, the factories, the streets. The thirst for education, so long thwarted, and an exclusive of the upper class and bourgeoisie during the period of Russian autocracy burst with the Revolution into a frenzy of expression. From Smolny Institute alone, the first six months, every day tons, car-loads, train-loads of literature, saturated the land. Russia absorbed the reading culture like hot sand drinks water, insatiable. And it was not fables, falsified history, diluted religion, and the cheap fiction that corrupts - but social and economic theories, philosophy, were greatly influenced by the works of Tolstoy, Gogol, and Gorky, some of the well-celebrated works across the globe.

The aforementioned aptly captured the Russian mood in the aftermath of the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917. As a starting off point, the question that comes to the front burner position is, why did the Russian empire fall? At the risk of a little bit of digression that is pertinent to this paper, it is worthy of note to mention that the Russian empire fell due to centrifugal forces and internal dynamics on many fronts. Firstly, Russia was attacked by the Japanese on the night of 8/9, 1904 when Japanese forces made a surprise attack on Russian warships in Port Arthur, and the



Russo-Japanese War began, (this war consequently led to a series of Russian defeats both on land and sea, culminating in the destruction of the Russian Baltic Fleet in the Straits of Tsushima). Of course, political discontent grew during the aforementioned war and this situation led to what was termed 'Bloody Sunday' when on a particular Sunday, a large crowd led by a priest Georgy Gapon protested in the Winter Palace and Russian troops opened fire and killed and injured several hundreds of Russians, 'Bloody Sunday' had reprisal attacks such as strikes, workers demonstrations, street fighting, peasant insurrection, and mutinies in both the Army and Navy.

Furthermore, the disorders were especially violent in areas inhabited by non-Russians, the revolutionary mood of 1905 thus climaxed in October with a nationwide railway strike. Russia was also actively engaged in the First World War and the Russian Army was seriously in short supply of munitions leading to Russia losing more than 1,000,000 men. It was at Pskov, where the last Russian Tsar, Tsar Nicholas II had been held and it was here he handed over his abdication: the thousand-year-old Russian monarchy had come to an end.

Hence, a major turning point in Russia history where literacy deficiency became strongly pronounced emanated upon the backdrop of the success recorded in the Bolshevik Revolution. The Bolsheviks were masses oriented, as such, tackling issues bordering on the wellbeing of the masses, the leadership were confronted with mass level of illiteracy among the people, especially, adult citizenry. With the intention of eradicating adult illiteracy and promoting universal education, Soviet authorities began a comprehensive and extensive educational programme in 1922. By 1938, the Soviet Union's elementary schools were organized into a four-year network by the government, while pupils living in cities attended seven-year schools.

Furthermore, the Soviet Union quickly established kindergartens as part of their national policy, despite the fact that there were essentially nonexistent in Russia prior to 1914. These schools used traditional educational methods and strictly maintained discipline. In contrast to tsarist schools, which taught only the basics of reading and mathematics, Soviet schools placed a great emphasis on language, literature, and history in addition to mathematics and the hard sciences. Between 1923 and 1927, the Bolsheviks began an extensive initiative called "Down with Illiteracy of Society," which relied on volunteers, in an effort to aid illiterate persons, especially the adult populace. Other expressions aiding this initiative include "let one literate teach one illiterate" and "workers of the World unite". Particularly excited attendees were members of the *Komsomol*, the Bolshevik youth organization. "Literacy is the path to communism," read one of its campaign posters, utilizing the traditional sign.

It is significant to note that Soviet literacy campaign is generic and gender-encompassing. The Soviet notion of literacy extended well beyond the traditional Western definition, encompassing a working understanding of the numerous industries that were most important to Soviet output, such as the mining, metallurgical, and textile

sectors. As a result, a large number of people who were already literate were merely considered semiliterate. Nonetheless, women were typically placed in the former group because of the Imperial school system's emphasis on male education. Posters were especially good at reaching these illiterate women since they mostly depended on visual clues (Martin, 2018).

Within this context therefore, Soviet leadership, pioneered especially by Lenin, was concerned in promoting the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the varying ethnic groups within the Union. This approach, apart from fostering allegiance to the government, built confidence of unity, cohesion, and development in the divergent groups. It further showcased the multi-lingual beauty of the Russian state. While literacy initiatives unfold, individuals were made literate in both the Russian language and titular linguistic functioning. In sum, Soviet Russia recorded unprecedented success in language and literacy campaign in global history. Also, Soviet Russia advanced greatly in technological know-how, on the singular fact that the vast majority of the populace, old and young, male and female, became literate, taking advantage of the initiative to explore scientific discoveries.

The Russian Federation; a Reflection on Soviet Mass Literacy Initiative

As earlier discussed, the Soviet Russia exemplified a prototype in the discourse of mass literacy campaign. This educational programme to a great extent, eradicated the high rate of illiteracy, prevalent in the Russian empire then, bringing the vast majority of the populace to being lettered. Upon the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) emerged as a sovereign geopolitical entity and became the sole inheritor of the vast prestige and glory of the defunct USSR. Scholarships of repute established that the Russian Federation implemented a great number of the Soviet Union policies in its early years of 1990s, language, education and literacy inclusive. What this implies is that the then-newly established Russian Federation got a template of policy orientation from the disintegrated Soviet Union. Thus, it was consequent upon this assertion that the Russian Federation was able to harness belligerent groups, address linguistic and cultural dichotomies, and forge a formidable Russian state.

Language and Literacy Campaign in National Development; taking Precedence from Russia Experience.

The place of language in identity construction cannot be overemphasized. It is also interesting to note that national development is to a large extent dependent on language in education endeavours. The singular reason being that education is communicated via language, and there will be no progress whatsoever in education unless there is a recordable success in literacy. From every possible indication, the Soviet leadership must have learned such implications that illiteracy could wreck on the success of the Bolshevik Revolution. Thus, the need for informed and conspicuous efforts to tackle the perceived vast number of

people who could not read and write. As a matter of fact, the citizens of the USSR being educated, contributed greatly to the quality of its manpower, as it was greatly improved upon. That aside, the Soviet Union economy was correspondingly strengthened and so the general quality of masses life became better. Significantly, mass literacy campaign built the sense of oneness amidst the vast majority of the people of the USSR, making the whole nation to benefit as Soviet societies became very literate. As Remington, Thomas (1999;1810) rightly observed, It is not that the Soviet population was uneducated: literacy was nearly universal, and educational attainment levels were among the highest in the world.

Situating Nigeria within Language and Literacy Campaign; the Soviet Prototype

As it has been mentioned in this study inter alia, the Soviet Union's language and literacy initiatives were second to none. It is very interesting to note that though the USSR was a conglomerate of fifteen polities, coming together to establish a formidable state of global strength, with its uniqueness as a multilingual society, owing to the very many people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds that were merged together as a single sovereign geopolitical entity. The plural nature of the USSR rather than being a bane to development, was hitherto, perceived as a benefit.

The implication for this was the immediate response to address illiteracy among the populace. Soviet leadership saw that if the vast populace could be educated, there would be an avenue for the maximum utilization of individual residual potentials in virtually all spheres of societal development: economically, culturally, socially, and politically.

By implication, developing countries, especially in Africa, are still to a great extent, battling backwardness in relation to science and technology advancement as a result of high rate of illiteracy. In Nigeria for example, major strategies put in place to address illiteracy are mostly in the area of child education, with adult population left out. Nigeria has one of the highest rates of illiteracy worldwide. Such a scenario of course, is quite shocking, bearing on the fact that Nigeria is the largest country in Africa. Hence, the effects of mass illiteracy is significantly observed in Nigeria's endeavour towards attaining 2015 Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) target. Ironically, this particular goal was to eradicate widespread illiteracy among the populace of the country.

Importantly, some measures have been put in place to address illiteracy in Nigeria. For instance, in June 1990, the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education (NMEC) was established as one of the steps taken to combat illiteracy. The initiative was created to serve youngsters who were not enrolled in school, homeless kids, and Almajiri kids in the northern part of Nigeria.

The introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) as a bold scheme in September 1996 is another egregious action. The UBE aims to instill in Nigerians a strong sense of responsibility for education. Importantly, the scheme, though targets eradication of

illiteracy among the populace, only focuses on the child education as it provides free universal basic education to all children of school age, and establish suitable programmes for children who are not in school or who have dropped out. This scheme to a great extent, suits the MDGs, as it aims achieving universal primary education, which is one of the highly recognised Millennium Development Goals' objectives.

Despite the achievement recorded by the various initiatives in Nigeria towards eradication of illiteracy, the Northern Nigeria is still relatively backward as most of the children, especially the poor and often homeless termed Almajiris are poorly motivated into active learning (Nwankwo, 2018; Kabiru, 2010; Isiaka, 2015). Also, adults literacy initiatives are not highly pronounced in Nigeria like in the USSR. Thus, Nigeria as a developing country still needs a lot to learn and implement in eradicating mass illiteracy, taking cognizance of the Soviet Russia's literacy campaign initiatives.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is demonstrated in this study that the USSR was very proactive in relation to eradicating mass illiteracy in the Soviet Russia and of course, the effects of this determined measure permeated throughout about the seven decades of the span of the Soviet Russia, spanning even into the Russian Federation which emanated in 1991 as an aftermath of the final break up and eventual disintegration of the USSR. Although measures have been put in place to address illiteracy in developing countries such as Nigeria, most of these measures typically address child education, with little efforts towards eradication of mass adult illiteracy. Hence, developing polities still have a lot to do in this respect, and the Soviet Russia's model is a prototype in achieving mass illiteracy eradication moves.

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