

## **Literacy, Information and Communication Technology as Tools for Empowerment of Inmates**

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The study investigated the present position of literacy, information and communication technology (ICT) in Prisons by examining the perception of inmates. The study adopted a descriptive survey using structured questionnaire and observation guides on a randomly and purposively drawn sample of 664 inmates out of a population of 47,628 inmates nationally. Frequency counts and percentage were used to analyze the data. The results indicated that in the 21 prisons studied in 12 Nigerian states, the literacy level was low; that inmates were inadequately rehabilitated and that the presence of information and communication technology was lacking. The findings have important implication for literacy development, information and communication technology programmes in Prisons for empowering inmates and reducing recidivism. This paper points to the need to retrace, redirect, restructure and refocus their services and activities on literacy, rehabilitation, information and communication technology so as to empower the inmates.

Key words: perception, literacy, information and communication technology, computer literacy, effectiveness, prison, and inmates

Literacy is considered to be the ability to read and write at a designated level of proficiency. In other word, literacy is more precisely defined as technical capacity to decode or reproduce written or printed signs (Graff 2009). UNESCO (1990) has defined literacy as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Some have argued that the definition of literacy should be expanded. For example, in the United States, the National Council of Teachers of English and the Reading Association have added 'visually representing' to the traditional list of competencies. Brammer (2002) also referred to literacy as linguistic cultural capital and talks about the constant change that permeates cultural literacy of our current society. Literacy refers to more than just the ability to read and write. Literacy refers to the knowledge and skills that students needs to perform effectively within a particular environment. Literacy is an amorphous term that changes with various contexts. Jele (2011) in support of Brammer's view on literacy said that literacy like all education is not neutral and never be neutral. This is because it is always socially-constructed, culturally-mediated and politically-intervened. According to Bloome, 1985; Heath, 1983; Luke, and Freebody, 1997; Street, 1984, they understand literacy to be social and situated, because the ways people work with texts is connected intimately to specific contexts and literacy practices differ across time and place. According to them, our definition of literacy is also shaped by more recent conceptions of disciplinary literacy, which hold that what it means to be literate differs across academic disciplines because experts in, for instance, science, mathematics and history read texts differently (Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Also Baildon & Damico (2011) highlighted that teacher and students should reconnect literacy with everyday life and with an education that entails debates, argument and action over social, cultural and economic issues that matter. Literacy is central to acquisition of skill and knowledge which affect productivity, governance and relationship; it is a crucial factor in economic, social, political and all spheres of development, thus a criterion in determining whether a nation is to be categorized as developed or not (Bulya 2011). Literacy may vary

from slowly deciphering a line of print and writing to effectively and efficiently scanning a page and rapidly grasping its meaning. Furthermore, literacy involves a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential and to participate fully in the wider society. Literacy is considered as the level of education acquisition which can lead to the functionality of an individual within a given context. Literacy leads to an improved use of language resulting in better habits of speaking and writing and also in clearer thinking and deeper understanding. The United Nations defines illiteracy as the inability to read and write a simple sentence in any language. Rogers (2011) defines literacy as the way in which we read, write, view, listen, compose, communicate information to people in any language. She explains further that digital literacy, computer literacy, E-learning and multi-media literacy are part of literacy to be advocated for the marginalized groups.

Literacy is indispensable and central to efficient functioning of every individual and the inmates inclusive, it requires adequate reading ability to cope with the demands of everyday living. Everybody and the inmates inclusive need digital literacy, computer literacy, multi-media literacy, and E-learning. Functional literacy is highly needed for inmates so as to be empowered and to be successful in life after being released from prisons. A person is said to be functionally literate when he or she has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enables him or her to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community. Reading skill is a key to acquiring knowledge. Literacy is all-important and has received international attention, because International literacy Day was acknowledged on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1982 and its observation is mandatory. Everybody knows the effect of illiteracy for hindering effective participation in social, political, economic and technological transformation of the country. Problem that is facing Nigeria is unimaginable low level of literacy and even among the inmates in Nigerian Prisons. In the study conducted by Tenibiaje (2010) on prisons inmates, highlighted that the rate of illiteracy among the inmates in Nigerian Prisons was high. Therefore there is need for prison inmates to be educated and not only that, to be computer literates.

The information and communication technology is generally regarded as the super high way through which information is transmitted and shared by people all over the world (Aribisala 2009). It is an indispensable tool for individuals. Individuals and nations have embarked on acquisition and utilization of (ICT), therefore it should be incorporated in addition to literacy in Prisons. ICT programmes will increase and equip the inmate's knowledge and opportunities in empowering them. The knowledge of ICT has improved technology in Nigeria positively in the area of economy, social and educative life of Nigerians. Information and communication technology, introduces individuals to computers, auxiliary equipment software, hardware, services and resources inter-connected together to form network that is used in the automatic acquisition, storage, manipulation, managements, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission or reception of data or information (Omotoso 2009). Ministerial Council of Education Employment and youth Affairs in Australia (2005) emphasized that engagement of prisoners in specific educational processes involving the use of ICT is necessary if they are to have opportunity to acquire the knowledge. Mossberger, Tolbert, & Stansbury (2003) concluded that effective access to ICT will significantly enhances a person to make well-informed career decisions and to have access to career-related lifelong learning. Warschauer (2003) opined that the ability to access, adapt, and create new knowledge using ICT is critical to social inclusion in today's era. The conclusion reached by Mossberger et. al (2003) and Warschauer (2003) indicated that offenders' motivation and capacity to achieve social inclusion after release from custody would be greatly diminished by their exclusion, during incarceration, from opportunities to learn how to use contemporary information and communication technology for legitimate employment-related purposes. The need for people to access ICT effectively, in order to enhance their employment

prospects, has been identified in numerous publications during the past few years (for example, MCEETYA,2005, Mossberger et al.,2003;Warschauer,2003). The inmates could be introduced into any of these arrays of units for training so as to empower them. Some people emphasized that information and communication will make the inmates to be involved in computer fraud but the statement is not true because information and communication security can be used to prohibit an unwanted interactions.

Prisons all over the world, are overcrowded, the population of inmates has drastically increased due to various reforms, Acts and Law enforcement established in various countries. The sentencing Reform Act of 1984 established determinate sentencing, abolished parole, and reduced good time, additionally several mandatory minimum sentencing provisions were enacted in 1986, 1988, and 1990. From 1980 to 1989, the inmate population was more than doubled, from just over 24,000 to almost 58,000. During the 1990s, the population was more than doubled again, reaching approximately 136,000 at the end of 1999 as efforts to combat illegal drugs and illegal immigration contributed to significantly increased conviction rates(FBOP2008) The increase in the number of inmates is not peculiar to developed countries but also to developing countries. For instance, as at 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2010, the number of inmates either convicted or awaiting trials has increased to 47,628 in Nigerian prisons. Despite the fact, that there was increase in inmate prisons, the infrastructural facilities and other things needed were not adequate. Also, no effort has been taken to reform, rehabilitate, educate and modify the behaviour of these prison inmates, rather the reformatory homes have become homes for hardened criminals in Nigeria. Concerted effort should be made to improve the conditions of these inmates; to widen their scope of work and job and to modify their behaviour. All these innovations can be done by NGO. This organization needs to focus attention to the prisons all over. These will have great impact on their lives and this may empower them through self employment.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There had been advocacy for the promotion of literacy and reading skills to all communities. Also a lot had been said on the importance of information and communication technology to individuals and to all nations for rapid development. To the best knowledge of the researcher there is no known research work carried out on literacy and information and communication technology in Nigerian prisons in particular. This study was carried out to identify the status of literacy, information and communication technology in prisons.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the statement of the problem discussed in this paper, the following research questions were generated to carry out this study:

- 1a. What is the level of literacy in Nigerian prisons?
- 1b. What is the extent of literacy in Nigerian prisons?
2. Do inmates have access to literacy inside the prisons?
3. What is the perception of inmates on literacy programmes?
4. What is the perception of inmates on information and communication technology programmes?

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent of literacy, information and communication technology in some prisons in Nigeria. The main purpose of this study was aimed to incorporate work related skills, literacy education, information and communication programmes into the prisons in Africa

instead of “training” that has yielded no fruitful result that is common in most prisons in Nigeria. The paper therefore makes a clarion call to the Non-Governmental Organization and Human Rights all over the world to redirect, retrace, reposition and refocus their activities, missions and visions to the prisons. Though, some Non-Governmental organizations address issues on environmental, health education, criminal justice, human rights, woman empowerment, youth empowerment, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, drugs, anticorruption, sustainable livelihood but literacy education, information and communication technology in prisons have been neglected. The inmates and ex-prisoners should not be marginalized and their problems need to be addressed. It is high time we addressed their problems. If this can be done it may improve the inmates’ lives and serves as tools for empowerment.

## **Methodology**

### *Design*

The research design adopted for this study is the descriptive survey type. This method is preferred because it attempts to capture the complexity of everyday behaviour.. Akinsola & Ogunleye(2002) highlighted the purpose of descriptive research was to systematically disenabled the facts and characteristics of a given population or area of interest factually and accurately.

### *Population*

The population for this study was made up of all the 47,628 inmates that were currently serving jail terms in all the 147 prisons in Nigeria. The population embraced male and female prison inmates. The research work was conducted in Nigerian prisons on inmates in 2011.

### *Sample and sampling technique*

The sample for the study was drawn from inmates in 21 prisons in 12 states in Nigeria, on account of different criminal offences. Samples of 664 inmates were randomly and purposively selected for the study.

### *Research Instrument*

The instrument used to collect data for this study were a structured questionnaire and an observation guides. It was developed by the researcher. The questionnaire contains items designed to elicit information from the inmates.

### *Validity and Reliability of the Instrument*

The instrument used for the study was a questionnaire that was presented to experts in guidance and counselling who established the content and face validity of the instrument. The reliability of the questionnaire was established using test-retest method. The instrument was administered to about twenty inmates who were not part of the main study. The administration was done within an interval of two weeks on two occasions. The data collected was subjected to Pearsons Product Moment Correlation Formulae and a correlation coefficient of 0.71 was obtained which was considered good enough for the study.

### *Data Analysis*

The data collected were analyzed with the descriptive statistics of frequency counts and simple percentages. The analyses are presented below.

*Question 1a:* What is the level of literacy in Nigerian prisons?

Table 1a. Frequency counts and Percentage Distribution of Responses of inmates in Nigerian prisons (n=664)

Literacy Level	Frequency	Distribution
Illiterate	365	54.96
Primary School Certificate	112	16.87
Junior Secondary School Certificate	108	16.27
Senior Secondary School Certificate	53	7.98
NCE	14	2.11
Bachelor	12	1.81
Total	664	100.00

Table 1a, indicates the literacy level of inmates are 365 (54.96%) respondents never attended school while 112(16.87%) attended primary school. Almost 108(16.27%) and 53(7.98%) have junior and senior secondary school certificates respectively. From all indications 585 (88.10%) respondents are illiterates. A very low percentage of inmates 14(2.11%) and 12(1.8%) have Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE) and Bachelor degrees respectively.

*Question 1b:* What is the extent of literacy in Nigerian prisons?

Table 1b. Respondents on literacy rating in Nigerian Prisons.(n=664)

Literacy Level	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Can you read Nigerian daily news paper?	165	24.85	499	75.15
Can you read the sign-post along the road i. e. visual literacy?	483	72.74	181	27.26
Can you communicate very well in English Language/ pidgin English with the officers in prison?	382	57.53	282	42.47
Can you write letters to your family if you are permitted in prison?	175	26.36	489	73.64
Do you have interest in furthering your education in prison?	432	65.06	232	34.94

Table 1b shows that 499(75.15%) of the respondents confirm that they can not read news- paper though 72.74% of the inmates can read and interpret signs or pictures along the road. This shows the prison inmates are not educated, even 489(73.63%) can not write letters. The respondents 432(65.06%) assert that they have interest to further their education if they are permitted to do so. Just a little above (57.58%) of the inmates can communicate very well in English Language/Pidgin English. This low percentage of literacy is shown among the inmates.

*Question 2:* Do inmates have access to literacy inside prisons?

Table 2. Frequency counts and percentage responses of inmates access to literacy in Nigerian Prisons. (n=664)

Inmates Access to Literacy in Prison	Sufficient		Insufficient		Not Available	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Access to literacy	1	0.15	12	1.81	651	98.04
Access to enhancement programme	20	3.03	47	7.06	597	89.91
Access to information	--	--	22	3.32	642	96.68
Access to Literacy skills	2	0.32	13	1.96	649	97.72
Access to vocational skill acquisition	9	1.35	412	62.05	243	36.60
Availability of facilitators	--	--	3	0.45	661	99.54
Availability of classrooms	--	--	10	1.51	654	98.49
Availability of teaching devices	--	--	2	--	662	99.69

Table 2 reveals the subjects response to the questionnaire. Overwhelmingly greater percentage of the respondents 651(98.04%) claim that they did not have access to literacy in prisons. It implies that literacy level is low among the inmates and nothing to write home about. The table also shows that 649(97.72%) respondents explained that literacy skills are not available in Nigerian prisons while vocational skills acquisition is available but insufficient as claimed by 412(62.05%) of the respondents. Enhancement programme are not available as claimed by 549(89.91%). Accessibility to information in the prisons is not available 96.68% though some respondents 3.32% argue that access to information is insufficient. About 661(99.54%) and 654(98.49%) attest to non – availability of facilitators and classrooms in the prisons respectively. This indicates that there is no provision for inmates to receive literacy or to learn reading and writing or to improve upon their literacy level.

Question 3: What is the perception of inmates on literacy programmes ?

Table 3. Frequency counts and percentages of responses on perception of inmates on literacy programmes in Nigerian Prisons (n=664)

Perception on Literacy Programme	YES		NO	
	N	%	N	%
Literacy programme improves reading skills of inmates	621	93.52	43	6.48
Literacy programme reduces level of thuggery in our society.	586	88.25	78	11.75
Literacy programme improves reasoning level of inmates	513	77.25	151	22.75
Literacy programme equips inmates with relevant information	549	82.68	115	17.32
Literacy programme affect the social/cultural mode of life inmates.	472	71.09	192	28.91
Literacy programme improves life pattern of inmates	487	73.34	177	26.66
Literacy programme promotes self employment	481	72.44	183	27.56
Literacy programme actualises the inmates dream	528	79.51	136	20.49
Literacy programme contributes to the development of	502	75.61	162	24.39

economy				
Literacy programme reduces crime in our society	632	95.18	32	4.82
Literacy programme increases awareness of inmates	574	86.45	90	13.55
Literacy programme should be incorporated into prisons programme	611	92.01	53	7.99
Would literacy programme bring behavioural changes among prison inmates?.	346	52.11	318	47.89

Table 3 indicates the perception of inmates literacy programmes. The respondents 621(93.52%) perceived that literacy programmes will improve reading skills. The inmates perceived that literacy programme will reduce the act of thuggery and increase reasoning levels and relevant information 88.25%, 77.25% and 82.68% respectively. On importance of literacy, the inmates attested to this that. 632(95.18%) claimed that literacy programme would reduce crime and 52.11% perceived that literacy programme would change the behavior of inmates. 611(92.01%) of the respondents said that literacy programme should be incorporated into prisons programme.

*Question 4:* What is the perception of inmates on information and communication technology programmes?

Table 4. Frequency counts and percentages response on perceptions of inmates on information communication and technology on prison inmates in Nigeria. (n=664)

Perception on information and communication technology (ICT)	YES		NO	
	N	%	N	%
Can you operate computer system effectively?	43	6.48	621	93.52
Is there any information communication technology centre in the prison?	89	13.41	575	86.59
Can you search information from google or yahoo?	62	9.34	602	90.66
Are there instructors or computer programmers in the prison?	10	1.51	654	98.49
Do you have adequate computer systems in the prisons?	53	7.98	611	92.02
Can you on or off computer without any assistance?	89	13.41	575	86.59
Information communication and technology programme promotes self-employment	642	96.68	22	3.32
ICT programme improves social life of individuals or even inmates.	648	97.60	16	2.40
Can ICT reduce the level of criminal activities?	489	73.64	175	26.36
Do you perceive that given rightful skills in ICT would likely provide job opportunity for inmates.	631	95.03	33	4.97
Are the inmates adequately trained in vocational education?	55	8.28	609	91.72
Does computer relate to ICT?	642	96.68	22	3.32
Do you understand the process involved in shutting down computer system?	646	97.28	18	2.71
Does data base relate to collection of data for research work?	576	86.75	88	13.25

Table 4 reveals the respondents perception on information communication and technology. Not less than 621(93.52%) respondents claim that they can not operate computer efficiently and 575(86.59%). Cannot shut down computer system without any assistance. Out of 664 respondents 43(6.48%) can operate computer. About 575(86.59%) respondents claim that ICT centres were not available in the prisons. it implies that they cannot collect or retrieve information neither can they communicate outside nor have access to services and resources with inter connected networks.

Also the respondents said that there was no adequate computer system in the prisons. The inmates perceived that the ICT programme promotes self employment, improve social life and reduces the level of criminal activities as being indicated in the table 96.68%, 97.60% and 73.64% respectively. 631(95.03%) perceived that given the right skill in ICT may likely provide job opportunity for inmates.

### **Discussion**

The result of the finding showed that illiteracy was very high in Nigerian Prisons. Illiteracy is not peculiar to inmates alone, according to Tenibiaje (2010) Nigeria is one of the countries that has high percentage of illiterates. The overall literacy rate has declined from 57% in 1999 to 49% in 2001 (Obanya 2004). Tenibiaje (2010) attested to the illiteracy level of inmates in South West Nigeria where education is taking seriously.

Tenibiaje (2010) in his study on literacy remediation for prison inmates highlighted that 54.76% of the subject were illiterates. This low percentage of literacy among the inmates might have impact on the life .and may lead to inferiority complex. Moreover, the inmates had no access to literacy inside the prisons, the literacy skills, classrooms, teaching devices and facilitators were not available in some of Nigerian prisons. The result on Table 3 shows the perception of inmates on literacy programmes. The inmates perceived that literacy programmes may have positive impact on them , improve reading skills, reduce the level of act of thuggery, improve reasoning level, improve life pattern, reduce crime in the society, increase their awareness, development of economy of the nation and development of the inmates. It is crystal clear that inmates in Nigerian prison are novice in the area of information and communication technology, since 621(93.52%) can not operate computer system successively. High percentage 90.66% can not browse or search for google or yahoo. In nearly all the prisons in Nigerian visited by the researcher, there was no functional computer system to make the inmates to be computer literate . 611(92.02%) attested to non-availability of computer system in Nigerian prison. From observation, the inmates in the prisons are not able to read and write, skilful and neither are they vast in the operation of electronic mail nor secure able to secure job in the field of information and communication technology.

### **Counselling implications**

The current results of the findings have important implication for development of literacy, information and communication technology programmes in Nigerian Prisons so as to empower the inmates and reduce recidivism. The study has some implications for the inmates in the area of reintegration, rehabilitation and transformation. However, if literacy and ICT are introduced in all prisons in Nigeria, then the programmes may have positive impact in them. The knowledge of computer skills will be indispensable for inmates at this time where every nation is in information age.



### **Summary and Recommendations**

The thrust of the study was to identify the present position or extent of literacy, information and communication technology. The findings showed that there was high percentage of illiterates in Nigerian prisons also there was no traces of information and communication technology programmes in the prison. However, the inmates were interested to be literates in ICT. The findings of this study therefore challenge the Non-Governmental Organisation (N.G.O) to assist the prisons in this area. Although, there are numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nigeria, but the NGO has not addressed literacy, vocational education, E-learning, information and communication technology in the prisons. The importance of information and communication technology (ICT) cannot be over emphasized, it offers an opportunity for direct communication between developing countries and helps in empowering the prison inmates. Also vocational programmes such as welding, auto-mechanics, photography, hair dressing, cosmetology and many other vocations can be incorporated into job skills programmes in the prisons.

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