CRITICAL AND DIGITAL LITERACY FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY

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ABSTRACT: *Literacy in Nigeria, even by the sub-Saharan Africa standard, is low. Much lower is critical and digital literacy. These two aspects of literacy hold the key to national development and security. This study examined these two aspects of literacy as crucial components of the literacy programme in Nigeria. The core elements of textuality for effective interpretation were studied. The study also took a look at digital literacy as a component of Nigeria's educational programme as a means to enhance classroom interaction and bridge some existing gaps in availability of resources and time. National development and security were seen to hinge on developing critical and digital literacy. The procedure adopted in the study was qualitative.*

KEY WORDS: text, discourse analysis, critical reading, digital literacy

INTRODUCTION

Literacy has stepped outside its traditional definition of being the acquisition of basic reading, writing, and numeric skills. In line with advancement in technology in the world today, literacy has come to include digital literacy – the ability to use technological devices, such as computers, to communicate and process information both online and offline. As Neilson puts it, "The way children are taught today is vastly different to how we were taught at school. Gone are the days of chalk boards and drills, replaced by iPads, IWBs (interactive whiteboards) and those lounge looking classrooms" (25 August, 2014, n.p.). Unfortunately, what she says is only true of the developed nations where she comes from. The story in this part of the world is different. A great number of children in Nigeria, especially in the North, have not been to school.

According to UNESCO 2015 statistics, Nigeria's literacy rate is 59.5%, as against the sub-Saharan Africa's average rate of 64% and the global rate of 86.3%. The figure for developed nations is 99.2%. This revelation about Nigeria makes addressing literacy here a critical matter, as far as development and security are concerned because these are linked. In the sub-Saharan Africa, especially West Africa, Islamic religious influence has affected literacy adversely. Wars have kept a lot of children out of school. The alarmingly low figures for West African countries can be seen in Table 1 below. Compare these with that of other African countries. Ironically, some Islamic

countries with positive literacy policies, such as Egypt, Libya, Iran and, surprisingly, Iraq, have high literacy figures.

COUNTRY	LITERACY RATE %
Benin (West Africa)	38.4
Botswana	88.4
Burkina Faso (West Africa)	36.0
Burundi	85.5
Cape Verde	87.5
Cameroun	74.9
Chad (West Africa)	40.1
Congo	79.3
Congo, Democratic Republic	77.2
Egypt	75.2
Cote d'Ivoire (West Africa)	53.1
Equitorial Guinea	95.2
Gabon	83.1
Gambia (West Africa)	55.5
Ghana (West Africa)	76.5
Guinea (West Africa)	30.4
Iran	86.8
Iraq	79.6
Kenya	77.9
Liberia (West Africa)	47.6
Libya	91.0
Mali (West Africa)	38.7
Niger (West Africa)	19.1
Nigeria (West Africa)	59.5
Senegal (West Africa)	55.6
Sierra Leone (West Africa)	48.0
South Africa	94.2
South Sudan	31.9

[UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) 2015 Estimate, Source Wikipedia]

Table 1. Literacy rate of some countries by UNESCO 2015 estimate

Problem

The focus of this paper is not just on literacy teaching in Nigerian schools but inculcating functional literacy which must involve critical reading and digital literacy. Having critical literacy skills means being able to develop critical thinking capacity and a deep understanding of textuality which, together with a rich background knowledge, will enable the reader to effectively interpret

a reading material and function properly in a literate society anywhere in the world. From this researcher's long experience teaching English language at the secondary and tertiary levels of education in Nigeria, he knows that critical and effective reading is very low here, far lower than the literacy figure posted.

As regards digital literacy, the situation is dire. The number of Nigerians who can operate the computer is very low. For the majority of the people, basic operation of mobile phones is their highest acquaintance with the developments in the information and communication technology (ICT). It is the youths who come close to exploring the potentials of even the phones, outside making and receiving calls. With computers too, it is the youths who are in the fore front of computer skills acquisition and use. Even in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, there are daunting challenges in the use of computers in teaching, unlike in the advanced countries of the world (See Ogu, 2012). However, the Nigerian youths and some older people have found the social media a good pastime for informal communication and relaxation. The fluidity and unrestricted management of information in these social media platforms have created a problem. Mobile phones make information access very easy. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp and so on, make the sharing of written, audio and visual media quite easy and cheap. For users who have not developed critical skills, it becomes a problem. Manipulative discourses are propagated and sometimes it poses a danger to society. It is, therefore, necessary to make critical thinking and reading a prominent part of literacy programme in Nigeria.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are the following:
i.   to examine some text processing skills which should be taught to enhance critical reading;
ii.   to examine digital literacy as a means of enhancing general literacy and learning in Nigeria;
iii.   to expound critical reading and digital literacy as essential components of a literacy programme in Nigeria for national development and security.

Theories

The theories and approaches to language teaching and researches that provided insight for this study are functional systemic grammar, text linguistics, discourse analysis, and computer assisted language learning (CALL). In the first three, the role of context in text interpretation is fundamental. Linguistic analysis extends beyond the system sentence contrary to the stance of sentence grammarians led by Chomsky. Text is seen as a unit of linguistic discourse and both the textual and situational contexts are taken into consideration in analysis. Text is seen to be a product of, and also constitutive of, discourse in a specific socio-cultural context. In computer assisted language learning, task-based and interactive language learning are advanced. Computer-mediated language learning provides adequate resources and tasks to engage the learner meaningfully and enhance the learning process.

Procedure

This study is qualitative. The researcher's more than thirty years' experience as a teacher of the English language at secondary and tertiary levels in Nigeria provided adequate insight to handle the issues raised here. This researcher also studied computer application in the teaching of language courses at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri in 2012 (Ogu, 2012) and findings from that provided a basis too.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The presentation here is done in three parts: critical reading, digital literacy and a look at the significance of critical reading and digital literacy in national development and security.
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A. CRITICAL READING

Critical reading is functional reading geared towards effective interpretation of a text. It is a crucial aspect of reading that must be addressed in literacy teaching in the classroom. The reader critically evaluates the information presented and relates it to his previous knowledge. Let us approach analysis here from two angles: the strategies a reader can bring into the reading situation (using the seven strategies advanced by Salisbury University as a template) and insights from discourse analysis and text linguistics in text interpretation.

Strategies adopted in Critical Reading

The Salisbury University (2009) listed seven strategies to be adopted in critical reading:

1. **Previewing**: Learning about a text before really reading it.
2. **Contextualizing**: Placing a text in its historical, biographical, and cultural contexts.
3. **Questioning to understand and remember**: Asking questions about the content.
4. **Reflecting on challenges to your beliefs and values**: Examining your personal reponses.
5. **Outlining and summarizing**: Identifying the main ideas and restating them in your own words.
6. **Evaluating an argument**: Testing the logic of a text as well as its credibility and emotional impact.
7. **Comparing and contrasting related readings**: Exploring likeness and differences between texts to understand them better.

Let us examine the following passage as a reading task before a 100 level student of a tertiary institution in Nigeria.

<div align="center">EXTRACT 1</div>

The diseases afflicting Western societies have undergone dramatic changes. In the course of a century, so many mass killers have vanished that two-thirds of all deaths are now associated with

the diseases of old age. Those who die young are, more often than not, the victims of accidents, violence and suicide.

The challenges in public health are generally equated with progress and are attributed to more or better medical care. In fact, there is no evidence of any direct relationship between changing disease patterns and the so-called progress of medicine.

The impotence of medical services to change life expectancy and the insignificance of much contemporary clinical care in the curing of disease are all obvious, well documented but well suppressed.

Neither the proportion of doctors in a population nor the quality of the clinical tools at their disposal nor the number of hospital beds is a causal factor in the striking changes in disease patterns. The new techniques available to recognize and treat such conditions as pernicious anaemia and hypertension, or to correct congenital malformations by surgical interventions, increase our understanding of disease but do not reduce its incidence. The fact that there are more doctors where certain diseases have become rare has little to do with their ability to control or eliminate them. It simply means that doctors, more than other professionals, determine where they work. Consequently, they tend to gather where the climate is healthy, where the water is clean, and where the people work and can pay for their services.

[Culled from an anonymous source, cited in Ihejirika, 2008, p. 71]

Applying the strategies listed in the Salisbury University document, a student doing critical reading of the passage above does the following:

1. He quickly skims the passage to determine what it is about on the surface. He will likely recognize that the passage is talking about changing patterns of diseases and the role of medical services and doctors in this.

2. The reader may not have lived in the period of time when mass killer diseases prevailed but from his personal background experience, he knows about diseases and medical services and the efficacy of such services.

3. From such personal experience, he can evaluate the arguments advanced by the writer:

- That the improvement in public health has nothing to do with progress in medical services;
- That neither the number of doctors available in a place, the quality of clinical tools they use, nor the amount of hospital beds available has anything to do with improvement in public health.

4. The reader places these arguments side by side with his own knowledge of the world and his beliefs about the efficacy of modern medical services. He may have experienced the benefits of medical services. He may also have been disappointed by them.

5. The reader may outline the arguments raised here, pointing out the main ideas of the text. He can also summarise the text, especially if it is a required classroom task. This shows his complete understanding of the thematic content and organisational structure of the text. He uses his own words as much as possible to summarise the passage. His summary may run thus:

- The diseases found in Western societies have changed so much that they are not the major causes of deaths.
- The improvement in public health is erroneously attributed to the improvement in medical services.
- The presence of doctors where diseases are rare is just a coincidence and not that doctors have the ability to control or eliminate the diseases.

6. The reader is then in a position to evaluate the reasoning of this writer to establish the validity. He may find it hard to believe that doctors with their sophisticated modern equipment cannot control and eliminate diseases. He may have seen relations and friends saved by doctors. Again, he may think the writer is contradicting himself: if improvement in medical services does not have any effect on diseases, how did the mass killers disappear? He may also observe the bias of the writer which he shows in the expression "the so-called progress of medicine". He may dismiss the writer as being cynical. Probably he has a motive which he has not disclosed.

7. The reader can compare and contrast the text with other related ones. He may have read some texts projecting positively the advancement in modern medical services. He can then decide to accept or reject the opinion of the writer. He can judge the information as objective or subjective, factual or not.

Insights from Discourse Analysis and Text Linguistics in Critical Reading

Discourse analysis and text linguistics have provided a new angle to look at linguistic analysis different from the one centred on the sentence as the highest level of linguistic analysis. Text is the focal point of the new approach advanced by the proponents of discourse analysis and text linguistics. Brown and Yule (1983, pp. 190-191) consider this definition of Halliday and Hassan the most apt in capturing what constitutes 'text':

> Halliday & Hassan take the view that the primary determinant of whether a set of sentences do or do not constitute a text depends on cohesive relationships within and between the sentences, which create **texture:** 'A text has texture and this is what distinguishes it from something that is not a text…. The texture is provided by the cohesive RELATION' (1976: 2). Cohesive relationships within a text are set up 'where the INTERPRETATION of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one PRESUPPOSES the other in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it' (1976:4). A paradigm example of such a cohesive relationship is given (1976:2):
>
> (1)   Wash and core six cooking apples. Put them into a fireproof dish.

> Of this text they say: 'it is clear that *them* in the second sentence refers back to (is ANAPHORIC to) the *six cooking apples* in the first sentence. This ANAPHORIC function of *them* gives cohesion to the two sentences, so that we interpret them as a whole; the two sentences together constitute a text' (1976:2).

It is on the basis of such a view of text as a unit of discourse that text linguistics proponents attempted to set up a kind of grammar to characterize text as we have with sentence grammar but they dropped the idea when they saw the futility. De Beaugrande & Dressler (1981, p. 3) came up with their definition of text:

> A TEXT will be defined as a COMMUNICATIVE OCCURRENCE which meets seven standards of TEXTUALITY. If any of these standards is not considered to have been satisfied, the text will not be communicative. Hence, non-communicative texts are treated as non-texts.

The seven standards of textuality are cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality.

We shall examine the seven standards of textuality of De Beaugrande & Dressler (1981) and other concepts in discourse analysis as we seek to determine how these will aid in critical reading.

Cohesion

De Beaugrande & Dressler (1981, p. 3) write about cohesion thus:

> …the ways in which the components of the SURFACE TEXT, i.e. the actual words we hear or see, are *mutually connected within a sequence*. The surface components **depend** upon each other according to grammatical forms and conventions, such that cohesion rests upon GRAMMATICAL DEPENDENCIES

The implication of this to critical reading is that the reader needs to be conscious of these ties existing among the structures in a text and needs to know how they affect meaning and interpretation. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) list lexicogrammatical resources used to realize cohesion and these are: conjunction, reference, substitution & ellipsis, and lexical relation.

Coherence

According to Beaugrande and Dressler (p. 4), coherence is taken to mean the way "concepts" and "relations" are linked to produce efficient communication in a text (what they refer to as "textual world"). Concepts are people, objects, actions, etc., which form the body of knowledge ("cognitive content") of a text. Concepts are linked together by relations**.** So a text is about what relations link

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what concepts and how they are linked. This network of concepts and relations is what is called coherence. Relations may not always be expressed explicitly but the reader is always looking for the relations between concepts and has to make inference to work out the link. Let me give an example to illustrate this:

(7)   He entered his house. Soon a fight started.

A reader of the sentences in (7) will naturally assume that the person referred to as 'he' who entered his house must be a reason or is part of the fight even though it is not explicitly stated. The reader arrived at this judgment by inference. The fact that the two sentences are contiguous forces a link to establish coherence. Otherwise, there would seem to be no coherence between the two. There is a relation between the concepts: 'his entering the house' and 'a fight started'. We assume that the person referred to by the nominal 'he' is the "agent" (being the initiator) in the "action concepts" 'entered' and 'started' (using the words of Beaugrande & Dressler, p. 4).

The authors listed relations that exist among concepts in a text which contribute to coherence. Let us explain some of these briefly and illustrate them.

i. Cause (Action A is the cause of Action B), e.g.

(8)   The driver lost control of the car and it skidded off the road.

ii. Enablement (A enabled B to happen, i.e. Situation A created the "sufficient but not necessary condition" for Event B to happen), e.g.

(9)   The door was open. The thief walked in and stole his phone.

iii. Reason (A is the reason for B, i.e. Action A is the "rational response" to Action B), e.g.

(10)   It was raining heavily, so Emeka could not leave the house.

iv. Purpose (A is the purpose of B, i.e. Event A was "planned to be possible because of" Event B):

(11)   He got a loan from the bank to buy a car.

v. Time (Event A happened before or after Event B), e.g.

(12) As soon as the armed robbers left the bank, the police arrived.

A critical reader should be conscious of these textual links which contribute to the coherence in the text. The reader is aware of how concepts, situations, events, etc, relate with one another.

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Intentionality

According to the source, intentionality, as one of the criteria determining textuality, concerns the intention and attitude of the writer or speaker towards the text in his bid to achieve his plan. For example, the intention of the writer of Extract 1 is to diminish the importance of medical services and doctors in the control and elimination of diseases. His attitude is one of cynicism. A critical reader should recognize the intention of the writer. The text producer has a plan and he uses all the textual resources such as cohesion and coherence to achieve that goal.

Acceptability

Beaugrande and Dressler see acceptability as the text receiver's attitude that the text should be a cohesive and coherent unit. Even where there seems to be a lack of explicit connection he forces himself to establish relevance through inference. In the illustrative sentences in (7) seen earlier, the receiver needs to draw the necessary inference to fill the gap to maintain coherence between the two sentences. The contiguity and sequence of the sentences forces the reader to interpret them as being related and the second sentence being possible because the first sentence happened.

Informativity

According to the source, a text can be assessed in terms of informativity when one considers the extent of unexpected and unknown information it is relaying as against the expected and known ones. A text constituting entirely of known or expected information is not informative except there is variability. A text constituting entirely of unknown or unexpected information is highly informative and will demand a high level of cognitive ability to process. It may be an impediment to a reader because he is deficient in the background knowledge required to process the text. In the organization of text, known information is regarded as 'given' whereas the unknown is regarded as 'new'.

Situationality

This concerns the circumstances that a text can be regarded as relevant to the situation in which it is used. A text may be suitable in one situation but inappropriate in another. This gives rise to the identification of text types. For example, a critical reader should be in a position to identify a text as belonging to a particular field.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality is to do with factors that make the utilization of one text dependent on another text, for instance, a situation where a reader will need to have read one text to make sense of another. If someone gets a letter which is a follow up of an earlier letter, he cannot make sense of it except he finds the earlier one and reads it. One text complements another. A critical reader should recognize such interdependence. In the social media, sometimes texts are lifted from their original context to manipulate the reader. Partial exposure to a text may give rise to a wrong interpretation

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and deduction. This is the tool of propagandists. A critical reader should recognize where there is a missing link.

Other issues in discourse analysis necessary in critical reading

There are a number of other issues in discourse analysis which are pertinent to the teaching of critical reading in the classroom. These are the following: context, presupposition, and inference. Some of these have been partly treated in our discussion so far. We will briefly explain these topics and their role in teaching critical reading.

Context: The role of context in the interpretation of meaning is vital. Context is of two kinds – the textual context and the situational context. The meaning of a linguistic form is determined in relation to the other words, phrases, sentences and even paragraphs around it. A typical example is in the interpretation of homonyms.

(13)   Chima gave Ngozi a ring.

The interpretation of 'ring' in this ambiguous sentence will depend on what other sentences that will co-occur with this (that is, the co-text).

(14)   Chima gave Ngozi a ring. He delicately slipped it on her finger.

The situation of context of the linguistic form can also help in determining its meaning. It will involve the social event taking place, the participants, their actions, the physical and socio-cultural contexts, and so on. For example, if (13) had occurred in a context identified as a church, the social event being a wedding and with such participants as priest, bride, groom, and the congregation, the other possible meanings of the word will not arise.

Presupposition: Writers often make certain assumptions about the knowledge of the reader by not making explicit some information needed for the interpretation of the text. The reader is expected to fill that gap from his shared knowledge of the world. For example, in the passage above (Extract 1), the writer took for granted that the reader would know what he meant by 'Western societies' and the kind of disease he classified as 'mass killers' in the following sentences:

(15)   The diseases afflicting <u>Western societies</u> have undergone dramatic changes.

(16)   In the course of a century, so many <u>mass killers</u> have vanished that two-thirds of all deaths are now associated with the diseases of old age.

The implication of this in teaching literacy is that the reader should be made to be ready to fill such gaps, may be by doing further reading if he lacks the expected knowledge.

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Inference: Inference is a strategy readers adopt to establish coherence and interpret a text that seems to have a gap in information. An example can be seen in the sentences that we saw when treating coherence: (7) He entered his house. Soon a fight started.

   Also, inference plays a great role in attaining a writer's intended meaning which may not be an exact mapping of the linguistic form used in expressing such meaning. As seen in irony and some other figures of speech, the literal meaning of an expression used by a writer to say something may not express his intended meaning. The reader then has to arrive at the intended meaning of the writer by making the necessary inference. Take, for instance, this extract taken from a text about Lagos:

EXTRACT 2

Most Lagosians are in origin Yoruba, although everyone of the multitudinous races of West Africa must be represented here. Yoruba women wear big, gay head-ties done in a knot at the back with the ends protruding, like brilliant giant butterflies. These women would sell their mother's milk at a profit. In Lagos market they are packed as close as hens in a battery, each with her pile of wares.

…………………………………………………………………………………………..

[a passage from *Four Guineas* by Elspeth Huxley culled from Moody 1970, pp. 34-35]

A critical reader cannot take the sentence 'These women would sell their mother's milk at a profit' on its face value. It is by inference that he will arrive at a meaning which is something like: 'These women are aggressive marketers and hard bargainers'.

DIGITAL LITERACY

Digital literacy should be a component of literacy in Nigeria. However, this aspect of literacy has not received much attention. For the country to catch up with the rest of the world, there must be a serious effort by the Federal and state governments and other stakeholders in the educational sector to address it adequately. From the comment by Neilson at the beginning of this paper, it can be seen that technology has changed the mode of teaching and learning from the prevalent traditional chalk and chalkboard method we still practice in Nigeria. Maybe that is why our rating in literacy is quite low. The intention of including this section of this paper is to point out the need to think digital in literacy issues in Nigeria.

What is digital literacy?

Digital literacy has been defined as:

> …the set of competencies required for full participation in a knowledge society. It includes knowledge, skills, and behaviors involving the effective use of digital

devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop PCs for purposes of communication, expression, collaboration and advocacy.

[source: Wikipedia]

Digital literacy is so important today that it is almost impossible to think of a life without it. Today, every facet of our day to day life has gone electronic: email, e-banking, e-commerce, e-learning, e-library, name it. It is now imperative that to produce citizens who are in tune with the world Nigeria must embrace and vigorously pursue digital literacy.

The potentials of adopting computer assisted language learning (CALL)

Computer assisted language learning (CALL) is a pedagogical approach which exploits the potentials of the computer in language teaching and learning. The computer has been seen to be very beneficial in communicative language teaching and learning. Kenning and Kenning (1990) in their book entitled *Computers and Language Learning* viewed the role of the computer in language learning against the background of the prevailing theories and methodology. The authors examined Stephen Krashen's theory of language acquisition where he sees conscious formal language learning as having very little effect on language acquisition. However, Krashen recognized 'optimal input' and low 'Affective Filter' as crucial conditions for language acquisition, (Krashen, 1981, 1982, and 1985, cited in Kenning & Kenning, 1990, pp. 83-84). To be able to perform appropriately in a natural language situation, the learner must acquire communicative competence which, according to Canale and Swain (1980, cited in Kenning & Kenning, 1990, pp. 38-39), comprises 'grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence'. The authors examined the role the computer can play to achieve competence in these areas, especially grammatical competence. The computer is seen to be very effective in providing optimal input, conditions that lower Affective Filter, interactional classroom activities, individualized learning and a learner-centred approach. The total experience can be summarized thus:

> Whether it is helping with grammar learning, with vocabulary expansion, or with the development of the appropriate skills and strategies, CALL can have a variety of roles in the classroom, depending on the local circumstances and what the teacher considers appropriate. It can be used to illustrate certain points, to reinforce and supplement classroom teaching, or to act as a compliment by focusing on areas which, for whatever reason, are not, or cannot be, covered in class. Once again, a key advantage of the medium is its flexibility (p. 133).

Other authors have identified the important role of ICT in language teaching and learning which include, but not limited to, the following:

- Use of the World Wide Web to access authentic language learning materials

- Availability of online reference materials such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, concordances, Wikipedia, etc.
- Learners publishing and sharing their output with their peers
- Practice exercises in the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing
- The ability to have asynchronous and synchronous communication with people anywhere in the world
- The ability to have a virtual classroom where teachers and learners can interact outside the classroom, thereby extending the learning time.

[See Warschauer, 1996; Davies, 2005; Hamano-Bunce, 2010; Chapelle, 2010; and Godwin-Jones, 2010]

However, in Nigeria, the application of the computer and other allied technological devices in language teaching and learning is very far behind. In 2012, this researcher carried out a study about the use of the computer in teaching the general English course (Use of English) at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) [See Ogu, 2012]. The study revealed that the use of the computer in teaching of the course was far from being realized in spite of the enormous benefits this would engender. The impediments observed which hindered the application of the computer in teaching and learning the course include: the lecturer's lack of the requisite knowledge of the computer applications that could drive the teaching; the students' limited knowledge of and possession of the computer; inadequate computers to take care of the population of students doing the course; unavailability of steady Internet connectivity, and the large classes which make interactive classroom activities almost impossible, especially given the little time allotted to the course in the timetable. If teachers and students had access to private computers that were Internet enabled and had adequate knowledge of the necessary applications, a virtual classroom would bridge the gap created by the large class size and the inadequate time in the timetable. Communicative language learning would have been greatly aided by the computer.

Nevertheless, the inevitability of mass digital literacy in Nigeria is now obvious. The entrance examination to gain admission into the various public tertiary institutions in Nigeria known as Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) conducted by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) is now written using computers. It is called computer-based test (CBT). Ever since the introduction of the computer in writing the examination, the processing speed of the examination has been very fast and, to a great extent, malpractices have been greatly reduced. However, this innovation is fraught with a lot of challenges which are expected given the level of technological and human development in the country. There have been reports of malfunctioning computers and fluctuating Internet access. Also many of the candidates came from backgrounds where the computer is not available. Nigeria has vast rural communities that do not have electricity not to speak of computers. Now that JAMB has introduced computer-based examination for the UTME, many rural school children must have at least a smattering of computer

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knowledge so as to write the examination to gain admission into tertiary institutions. This means digital literacy is now imperative.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CRITICAL READING AND DIGITAL LITERACY IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY

One may question the correlation between critical reading and digital literacy, on the one hand, and national development and security on the other hand.

It is not in doubt that development has a direct connection with literacy. It is not a coincidence that the developed nations have the average literacy figure of 99.2% as given in Table 1. A nation with vastly illiterate citizens will be hampered in many ways that we cannot imagine.

In the world today, knowledge and application of ICT is the driving force in every facet of our life – medicine, education, banking, commerce, engineering, name it. So a nation of which only a minute fraction of its population has the ability to use the computer is in trouble. Development becomes a mere dream.

In national security too, recent developments in Nigeria can be traceable to lack of critical reading and incompetence in digital skills. The first one is insurgency and rise in ethnic agitations. Propagators of violent ideologies and hate speeches rely on propaganda to enlist supporters. They use the media to spread their messages. They are all over the social media. If we have critical readers who can discern manipulative discourse, such propaganda would not have pervasive influence.

Again, cyber crime and other internet related criminal activities may be curtailed if the average Nigerian has digital competence. He can detect when an internet user is trying to defraud him or take undue advantage of him. He will be in a position to recognise when he is in danger of being defrauded and can protect his account online. A lot of gullible youths are on Web and critical reading skills too will help to protect them.

CONCLUSION

This study has taken a look at critical reading and digital literacy in Nigeria and came to the conclusion that the teaching of these two should form a part of the literacy programme in Nigeria. The nation's position in the literacy index is very poor. In these two areas addressed in this research, vigorous advocacy and serious intervention are required for there to be meaningful development and security in the country.

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