



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT: AN ESSAY OF A THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL REVIEW

**Yvette Ahonami
DOGNON**

PhD student in "Economic Cooperative, Management and Development", African University for Cooperative Development (UADC), Cotonou - Benin.

ABSTRACT The relationship between literacy and empowerment is presented as a field of research whose contours, variously appreciated, have broadened over time. While investing in the literacy of populations, in particular that of women, could help to promote their empowerment in a certain way, the fact remains that these two concepts (literacy and empowerment) are multifaceted and full of controversies in terms of approaches. What moreover makes their understanding dynamic. This paper attempts, to this end, to clarify these two concepts and studies the possible link between them, while referring to the literature.

KEYWORDS : Literacy - Empowerment - Rural woman

In recent years, the role of human capital in the development of human beings has experienced renewed interest and is widely discussed in the economic literature [(Romer, 1989), (Lucas, 1988), (Henin et al., 1994)]. Literacy¹, in particular adult literacy is perceived as a determining factor in the well-being of the individual (Yéou, 2010) and fits naturally into this movement. Beyond the fact of learning to read and write, literacy gives the possibility to acquire skills in management, leadership, take part in projects for the improvement of the quality of life. It allows learners to strengthen their skills, their human capital ... in order to allow their socio-economic integration. Indeed, the courses bring to the participants an awareness of their possibilities and their capacities for taking initiative in their daily life (Freire, 1970). In Brazil and Chile where he conducted a study, Freire (1963) found among literate people not only an improvement in their income but also and above all the disappearance of feelings of marginalization and inferiority complex. In any case, literacy enhances man. It instructs him through all the knowledge, skills and competences that it provides him with and which are a source of productive dynamics and social and cultural well-being. As recognized by UNESCO (2009), literacy is important for communication and learning of all kinds; it is a fundamental condition for knowledge societies today qualifications and skills which it provides and which are a source of productive dynamics and social and cultural well-being. As recognized by UNESCO (2009), literacy is important for communication and learning of all kinds; it is a fundamental condition for knowledge societies today qualifications and skills which it provides and which are a source of productive dynamics and social and cultural well-being. As recognized by UNESCO (2009), literacy is important for communication and learning of all kinds; it is a fundamental condition for knowledge societies today.² In short, literacy is a determining force in development in that it opens avenues for self-promotion and the well-understood transformation of the environment for individual and collective well-being (Napon et al., 2005).

This issue is very interesting and its development invites us to an exploratory review of the literature. First, the clarification of the terms "literacy" and "empowerment" is essential to serve as a basis for the analyzes that follow.

Conceptual framework of literacy and empowerment

Trying to measure an economic phenomenon logically implies having previously defined its nature. Therefore, understanding the link between literacy and empowerment requires at first glance the definition of certain concepts whose understanding is important for the purposes of a relevant analysis.

Notion of literacy

When we are interested in the definition of the term literacy, we realize that it is not only the prerogative of the only branch of study that is the Economy. Literacy literature has been abounded by various disciplines (sociological, linguistic, anthropological, historical, geographic, etc.) which have favored its compartmentalization to make it a concept that is both evolving and convoluted. It therefore seems complex to define literacy in an academic form. Indeed, despite the great availability of documents, the notion of literacy has evolved and has known multiple interpretations in relation to time, space and context. If at the beginning of the 1920s, the notion of literacy came down to the instrumental capacity of writing, reading and arithmetic in a given

language, this notion has undergone profound changes which have contributed to shaping it gradually over time. To this end, a non-literate person should be considered as "a person who has acquired the knowledge and skills essential to the exercise of all the activities where literacy is necessary to play an effective role in his group and his community. and whose results achieved in reading, writing and arithmetic are such as to enable him to continue to put these skills at the service of his own development and the development of the community and to participate actively in the life of his country" (UNESCO, 1962). This definition heralded a change in the purpose of literacy: from an end in itself, it becomes a means, a tool at the service of economic development. It denotes from this definition that literacy is influenced by the sector of economic activity. This can easily be seen in the definition of Traoré (1988) who speaks of literacy that seeks to give the newly literate knowledge directly usable in social practice. We will talk about the functionality of literacy. However, this definition (of literacy) remains selective and narrow: it links literacy to a given vocational training program or economic activity. This functionality - which we will come back to - then has a strictly economic meaning (De Clerk, 1993). The current evolution of the world as well as the awareness of a necessary human dimension in the conception of development (Hamadache and Martin, 1988) would encourage a certain reconsideration of the concept with regard to the objectives to be achieved. It will follow in 1975, at the Congress of Persepolis³, a re-examination (of the concept) deeply influenced by the education of conscientization, dear to Paulo Freire (Bhola, 1988). Henceforth, literacy not only integrates the economic dimension, but also highlights new issues such as the personal fulfillment and development of man; awareness for change.... Literacy would henceforth be seen as "a political, human and cultural process of awareness raising and liberation" (Ramdas, 1989). It is thus conceived as an important agent of both personal and social change; and recognized, as such, as an essential tool to gain legal and socio-economic rights (Stromquist, 1990). It is therefore part of human rights according to UNESCO (2008), which recognizes that "the notion of literacy is proving to be both complex and dynamic, continuing to be interpreted and defined in many ways". As such, we could therefore distinguish three main types of literacy (Koutrémon, 2013) which are the following.

Traditional literacy:

which is a classical and formal teaching approach based on learning to read, write and calculate. For Akroman (2011), this type of literacy targets as many people as possible and addresses all socio-professional categories at the same time, with the same content, methods and strategies, without distinction of needs, expectations and results. On analysis, traditional literacy is therefore mass literacy whose methods and techniques are based on the use of a single syllabary with content that does not take into account the socio-professional activities of the learners (Yéou, 2010).

Functional literacy:

which is the learning of writing, reading and arithmetic and which is accompanied by the acquisition of knowledge and skills truly adapted to daily life and to the needs of target populations and the community (UNESCO, 1962). It aims to communicate to the learner a knowledge that suggests a behavior so that he can act in favor of the environment in which he lives and on himself (Koutrémon, 2013).

Awareness-raising literacy:

This new approach links literacy and liberation of individuals. It starts from the world and the experiences of illiterate populations and requires the existence of an egalitarian relationship between teachers and learners in order to encourage the emergence of critical capacities, and therefore transformative of reality (Yéou, 2010).

The concept of literacy is therefore multifaceted and fraught with controversy in terms of approaches; which makes its understanding dynamic. Its conception is all the more complex when it sets itself the objective of ensuring the empowerment of society (especially that of a layer as vulnerable as rural women).

Concept Of Empowerment

Simplistically, empowerment can be understood as a process allowing a person or an organization to endow the means necessary for its autonomy. For Kabeer (2001), autonomy is "the expansion of the capacity of individuals to make strategic life choices in a context where this capacity was previously denied to them". Women's autonomy covers several dimensions (Dahoun et al., 2013) which makes it difficult to define, especially since it can be effective in one dimension while it is not in another [Kishor (1995, 2000), Hashemi et al. (1996), Malhotra & Mather (1997), Beegle et al. (2001)]. This complexity in defining autonomy is also due to its contextual character, and could be related to the phenomenon of gender inequality, it being understood that men and women are typically unequal in different aspects, and that the nature or the extent of their differences may vary from one area to another (Mason, 1986).

According to Mayoux (2000), empowerment is multidimensional due to the power relations that take place in the different spheres of life (economic, social, political) and at different levels (individual, household, community, market, institution)".

The nomenclature of the components of empowerment varies according to the authors (Malhotra et al. 2002). However, in the empirical literature, a certain consensus is made on the six components of empowerment: economic, socio-cultural, political, legal, interpersonal and psycho-cognitive (Malhotra et al., 2002).

The economic component covers productive resources while the socio-cultural component is a range of sub-areas of empowerment, from marriage systems to norms regarding women's physical mobility, to the non-family social support system and to the networks available to women. (Malhotra et al., 2002: 11).

The interpersonal component is linked to the process of empowerment within the household and in relations between family members (Malhotra et al., 2002; Rowlands, 1998) while the political component refers to the notion of organization (Stromquist, 1995)⁴ and that of a political institution (ACDI, 1997).

Regarding the legal component, it covers the legal and constitutional recognition of women's rights (Malhotra et al., 2002). It is about the legal protection of their rights as well as their representation and participation within institutions. The psycho-cognitive component, on the other hand, represents an amalgamation of the psychological and cognitive dimensions of Stromquist (1995), the individual well-being of Nelson et al. (2002) and the vision of the future of Schuler et al. (1997). This area also refers to self-confidence, self-esteem and the "sense of agency". Of the individual, or the reflection behind the action. Considering the above definitions, the term "empowerment" seems more relevant for marginalized groups such as the poor, the illiterate and, of course, women, who cut across all these categories. To this end, we question the literature on the possible relationships between literacy and empowerment, in particular when it comes to women.

Relations between literacy and empowerment

The literature on the importance or even the usefulness of literacy is relatively abundant. For decades, several development actors (international and multilateral organizations, Technical and Financial Partners, donors, NGOs, civil societies) have been evoking the reasons that justify literacy projects and programs. In general, for these organizations, literacy is seen as an essential tool for human development, and even empowerment.

The design of organisms

Indeed, following work that she carried out on a sample of one million women in the United States and 48 developing countries in Africa, Asia

and South America, the NGO Proliteracy WorldWide (2004), concludes that the high infant mortality rate, low life expectancy and the prevalence of malnutrition in these regions are attributable to the low literacy rate observed there.⁶

Extending his thoughts on literacy, but this time around its impact on peace and reconciliation processes in post-conflict contexts, with Colombia as an illustrative reference, the NGO Proliteracy WorldWide (2004) also highlighted another advantage of literacy. Indeed, the CLEBA (Centro Laubach de la Educación Popular Básica de Adultos), a Colombian NGO that implements literacy programs in Medellín, relies on the method of "pedagogy of the text" according to which learners are "inspired by what they lived to write texts. Some 900 men and women who left for Medellín, rural areas hard hit by armed conflict, took part in an adult literacy project mainly focusing on the themes of citizenship and peace education, whether they are appropriate, according to the NGO (ProLiteracy Worldwide, 2004).

In the same vein, the NGO SIL international (2005) shows, as far as it is concerned, that literacy is important for social development, both in terms of production and consumption. As they can better participate in democratic and political processes, literate adults are better able to understand and defend human rights.⁷ In fact, literacy plays a decisive role in the life of a woman and consequently in the life of her family, in particular with regard to health issues. Women who can read are more motivated to participate in the electoral process, whether as an electoral candidate, a member of a candidate's team or as a voter. There are many practical examples of communities becoming more economically and socially engaged as soon as they become literate.

UNESCO (2007) sees literacy as one of the main elements necessary to promote sustainable development, in that it empowers people to make the right decisions in the field of economic growth, development and environmental integration". The organization (UNESCO) recognizes that an educated person is better equipped to meet all the challenges of life; in this case, from the challenge of looking for a job to that of avoiding disease⁹. "When an illiterate woman becomes literate," he continues, "her chances of seeing her situation improve individually and socially increase dynamically. These women subsequently see their work and employment opportunities improved and their autonomy strengthened within their communities".

On the other hand, the organization sees literacy as an indispensable tool in the process of empowering individuals, families and communities, in that it improves their quality of life. Also, she concludes, "thanks to its multiplier effect, literacy helps to eliminate poverty, reduce child mortality, curb population growth, achieve gender equality and ensure sustainable development, peace and democracy, in short, the empowerment of being"¹⁰.

Along with these studies from these organizations, specific development actors, several theoretical and empirical works have been carried out by authors to test the robustness of these ideas. The results (resulting from this work) vary according to the discipline of study (sociology, linguistics, economics, etc.), the methodology used, the period of study and the perimeter of the experiment.

Controversial aspect of the impact of literacy

From a theoretical as well as an empirical point of view, a whole series of studies have been carried out to account for the importance or not of literacy.

In a study conducted by Bhola (1989) on Zimbabwe, the author finds better incomes among literate people since they make real use of their knowledge on a daily basis.

Bhola (2004) also notes that in China adult literacy has unexpectedly enabled economic transformations; and that these projects, implemented for political ends, will allow the country to swing from the socialist economy to the market economy.

Brazil has a tradition of literacy and thus has the specificity of having been strongly marked in adult literacy programs by the influence of the Freire method (1963). Literacy programs have profoundly transformed the lives of people in this country, as Ponczek and De Baldini Rocha (2011) have shown. According to these authors, the new writing and reading skills of literate people have had a positive impact

on their economic and financial situation due to the increase in labor productivity. They estimate at 10% the additional income attributable to literacy.

In Africa more particularly, literacy programs are generally initiated in educational structures organized and authorized by the public authorities (Yéou, 2010). The courses received would enable literate people to become aware of their possibilities and their capacities for taking initiative in their daily life. Bhola (2004) notes in Tanzania a feeling of integration and self-confidence on the part of literate people who have received "access to the light" through the courses they have received.

From an economic point of view, Carr-Hill (2001) notes in Uganda, that literacy courses promote an increase in household income and give them the means to support their children, especially for school fees.

In terms of democracy, although, the exact nature of the relationship between education and democracy remains unclear and difficult to measure with precision (Hannum and Buchmann, 2003), and the contribution of civics typically found on the formal education curriculum and courses literacy training has not been established with certainty, the Civics Education Study conducted by the International Association for the Assessment of Educational Achievement (IEA) among 14-year-old students in 28 countries 1999 and students aged 17-19 in 16 countries in 2000 revealed that when young people have a good knowledge of democratic institutions, they are more inclined to vote once they become adults. This study also shows that establishing democratic practices in literacy classrooms is the best way to promote civic knowledge and engagement of learners.

This series of results establishing a relevant link between literacy and improvement of the living conditions of agents is however far from unanimous. Contrary to previous conclusions, certain theoretical and empirical works have led to ambiguous conclusions, others suggest a certain disconnection between literates and the propensity to empower themselves. These kinds of results can be seen especially in Africa, where literacy programs have been legion.

Indeed, focusing on Ivorian peasants, Gurgand (1997) shows that their education does not lead to an improvement in their productivity. He even notes a reduction in the supply of agricultural labor following education. These conclusions are consistent with those of Puchner (2003), in Mali, who indicates that the participation of some women in the literacy program of their village had very little impact on them. Their experience, following these courses, differs very little from the non-literate. The reasons they evoke are among others the prevalence of a cultural ideology where socio-political life is dominated by men. This makes any change difficult, and the difficulty for these women to be truly literate despite these programs. And even when they do manage to read and write,

In Togo, Koffi-Tessio et al. (2007) studied the impact of literacy policies on food production and security. The study aims to identify the relationships that exist between literacy policies implemented in the country, and food production and security. Based on the co-integration techniques, the results reveal the existence of a long-term equilibrium relationship between literacy and food production on the one hand, and between literacy and food security on the one hand, and between literacy and food security on the one hand, somewhere else. The estimates also show that, while the effects of physical capital variables on food production and availability are mostly negative, both in the short term and in the long term, reflecting the low recourse by farmers to modern agricultural production techniques, the role of the literacy variable (human capital) is mixed. The effect of literacy appears to be positive in the long term on food production, while in the short term it turns out to be rather negative, which could be explained in part by the existence of constraints on agricultural production. In terms of food security, the effect of literacy has turned out to be negative in the short and long term due to the low level of investments and the inadequate content of educational programs. It is therefore necessary to improve the quality of investments as well as the content of literacy and schooling programs. In addition, the

In Namibia, Bhola (2004) indicates a low presence of income-generating activities among neo-literates because of the inadequacies of the local market.

This quick overview of the relationship between literacy and the living

conditions of literate agents has enabled us, on the one hand, to gain an understanding of the theory. On the other hand, he highlighted the controversial nature of the empirical relationship between literacy and well-being, development or efficiency of the literate. In addition, without specifying it, he refers us to the particular case of women to whom there is a problem of availability and whose daily occupations are numerous and painful [Clignet (1982), Gessain (1994), Nelson et al. (1986)].

Cases peculiar to rural women

As far as her availability is concerned, the situation of women is quite particular throughout the world, and especially in Africa south of the Sahara. Indeed, from a comparison between women's and men's work, Brenda (1981) concludes that women spent more hours working than their husbands. Szalai (1985) uses multinational data to show that women have little free time per day compared to men and to conclude that the free time of housewives hardly exceeds four hours per week. Speaking of the education of women, the author establishes that the free, irregular and reduced time available to women and the constraints that beset them are major factors which explain their low participation.

Indeed, Sanou (1998) studied the representations that neo-literate rural women in Burkina Faso have of success in literacy, by analyzing the perceptions of fourteen women from three Burkinabé villages, namely Bagrin, Tanlarogo, Nongstenga, located in the center of the country. Data collection was carried out using semi-structured interviews and a group interview.

The content analysis was based on the general Ecuyer content analysis model. The analysis showed that for a majority of women, the fact of never having been to school is perceived as a gap; literacy is therefore seen as an opportunity to learn and to fill this gap. For these women, literacy is also a means of accessing gainful employment, which enables them to maintain their homes, provide for their children and become financially self-sufficient. has been approached from two angles by the author: from the objective angle (success, cognitive and socio-economic achievements), and from the subjective angle (emotional, personal and social achievements). Under' As an objective angle for success in literacy, the author noted that the knowledge acquired in the mother tongue, although perceived as a positive contribution by the respondents, is insufficient and that their use is rarely sought. Regarding the perception of neo-literates in relation to the socio-economic progress due to their literacy, the author points out that the respondents say they have recognized a slight increase in the income obtained from their commercial activities although literacy in Mooré does not systematically open doors to employment for them. The women also mentioned that the knowledge acquired in hygiene and nutrition seemed difficult to put into practice, due to lack of resources. The author noted that the knowledge acquired in the mother tongue, although perceived as a positive contribution by the respondents, is insufficient and that its use is rarely requested. Regarding the perception of neo-literates in relation to the socio-economic progress due to their literacy, the author points out that the respondents say they have recognized a slight increase in the income obtained from their commercial activities although literacy in Mooré does not systematically open doors to employment for them. The women also mentioned that the knowledge acquired in hygiene and nutrition seemed difficult to put into practice, due to lack of resources. are insufficient and their use is rarely sought. Regarding the perception of neo-literates in relation to the socio-economic progress due to their literacy, the author points out that the respondents say they have recognized a slight increase in the income obtained from their commercial activities although literacy in Mooré does not systematically open doors to employment for them. The women also mentioned that the knowledge acquired in hygiene and nutrition seemed difficult to put into practice, due to lack of resources. are insufficient and their use is rarely sought. Regarding the perception of neo-literates in relation to the socio-economic progress due to their

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From the point of view of their participation in associative and civic life, the results do not show a direct relationship between this and literacy. However, the analysis of the results nevertheless showed that literacy reinforces, among other things, the respondents' perception of the importance of their civic duties. The respondents also felt that it is thanks to literacy that the villagers can receive visits from abroad and these visits are considered as great gains.

Using the triangulation method as a methodological approach in a study carried out in Niger, Haboubacar (1998) states that the literacy project carried out in the Maradi region had poor repercussions on the daily life of rural women. The results obtained show a virtual absence of any link between literacy and the economic and socio-cultural context. He points to the mismatch between the content of the courses and the needs of women. He also points out that there is almost no practical use of modern agricultural production techniques. Finally, he recommends that, in order to be effective and sustainable, literacy training for rural women in regions like Maradi must be carried out in a suitable material situation while at the same time revolutionizing their relationship with nature.

In a study from Bangladesh, Basu et al. (2002) indicated that the level of education of other household members affects the work income of a literate person present in the household.

Bhola (2004) has shown that in India, literate women, strong in their skills, are less eaten away in commercial and financial exchanges.

In Mali, Konaté (2010) found that by taking part in the literacy program, women developed skills that enabled them to generate income. For good reason, the program taught them the implementation, conduct and management of non-agricultural lucrative activities and also allowed them to form a cooperative in order to sell their agricultural products. Thanks to their new skills, women have become aware of their ability to engage in non-agricultural income-generating activities and thus improve their economic conditions and change their lives.

In summary, most of the aforementioned works have some limitations which suggest putting their results into perspective, particularly with regard to the analyzes and methodological approaches adopted.

In terms of analysis, each of them focused on a limited number of empowerment components. Indeed, the covered dimensions of empowerment vary from one study to another, which does not facilitate the reconciliation of the results and their use for economic policy decisions (Dahoun et al., 2013).

In terms of methodological approach, with the exception of the work of Koffi Tessio et al. (2007) concerning the impact of literacy policies on food production and food security in Togo, several of these studies limited their reasoning to the use of descriptive statistics. Indeed, if the use of these statistical tools allowed the authors to structure and represent the information collected during the interviews, it limits the analysis to qualitative results; knowing that these could have been estimated and tested for further study.

Despite these shortcomings, however, this review enabled us to realize the richness and diversity of analyzes on the literacy issue.

CONCLUSION

The central idea that emerges from this essay is that there is a large body of literature devoted to the usefulness of literacy for empowerment. The analysis focused mainly on developing economies where more convincing empirical results of the role of literacy in the socio-economic and political dynamics of populations have proved to be rich in lessons. The particular case of African women remains controversial, even if the issue is relatively little studied. Indeed, if this theory seems to give this sort of equally mixed results with regard to women, especially rural women, some avenues of research relating, on the one hand, to methodological choices, and on the other hand, to the nature of implemented programs would appear promising and relevant.

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