

Illiteracy: The Downfall of a Society

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Being able to read and write is the basis of general education which is the right of every individual. Therefore, literacy is very important for the growth and progress of society as well as individuals to satisfy one's needs throughout life. Illiteracy is not restricted to any race, region or socio-economic class but is a widespread issue which needs to be addressed seriously as it determines the present and future socioeconomic vulnerability of a society. It confines the full development of individuals and their involvement in society by affecting a person's family environment and hindering one's basic learning needs.

Illiteracy is one of society's greatest shortcomings. It restricts access to the benefits of an individual's basic development. Obstacles faced by illiterate individuals are far greater than literates on a personal as well as social level. Given their low level of knowledge and expertise, illiterate individuals face serious employment issues. They are unaware of their rights and duties and are more prone to high rates of diseases, lower productivity and high health care costs (Grady, 1994).

The impact of illiteracy can be divided into categories such as health, education, economics and social integration and cohesion. With regard to health, illiteracy limits an individual's ability to understand the importance of necessary self care. This phenomenon can be seen within a household, at workplace and in sexual and reproductive behavior. Education begins at birth and continues throughout life. Consequently, the social effects of illiteracy are present throughout the entire life cycle. Illiterate parents have lower educational expectations and aspirations for their children. They cripple their children's lives by depriving them of their basic education right and instead make them learn some skill to earn livelihood.

Another major cause of illiteracy is the economic condition of the people. Those living in poverty cannot afford to go to school and most of the children are put to work at young age. Due to illiteracy, the income one could receive throughout one's working life is reduced. Illiterate people hardly get better-paying positions or jobs as they lack the necessary skills and schooling. The eradication of illiteracy should be a social objective as well as an economic priority since it has a negative impact at the loss of productivity due to its effect on labor income and on the quality of employment (Dolan & Scariano, 1995).

Illiterate persons suffer from low self-esteem in the society and are denied the social recognition that they deserve. They are deprived of the individual rights to which they are entitled by law. And hence fail to participate actively in the attainment of the collective rights that are essential to their dignity.

Illiteracy fails to encourage positive social change, personal growth, or the preservation and development of language and culture. We need to break the cycle of illiteracy so that all people have equal opportunity to succeed in the world. The challenge is to turn the problem into an opportunity. The best means of overcoming poverty caused by illiteracy is education and by encouraging families to value education and getting illiterate individuals into literacy programs. The direct impact of literacy teaching would increase human productivity. Thus, the eradication of illiteracy would benefit all of society by providing the minimum skills necessary for the development of personal abilities which will ultimately reduce the burden on economic support systems.

References

Dolan, E. F., & Scariano, M. (1995). *Illiteracy in America*. New York: F. Watts.

Grady, S. M. (1994). *Illiteracy*. San Diego, CA: Lucent Books.