

Pivotal Causes of Illiteracy in Haiti

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Introduction

One of the most serious social problems in Haiti with compounding effects is illiteracy. It has hobbled the Haitian people for centuries. Some observers claim that illiteracy is the result of colonization [1] and a legacy of the years immediately following independence [2]. The absence of literacy in a country creates many problems. Poverty is the chief one [3]. Illiteracy obstructs opportunities for economic growth and social stability [4]. People who are illiterate stand little to no chance of becoming financially independent. This is a true reflection of Haiti where the prospects for development are slim. In 1990, the yearly income was \$300 [5]. As one can see by the trends, the expectation for greater per capita income in recent years is not promising.

The history of education during colonization has been a major factor in the problem of illiteracy in Haiti. The frequent political crises in the country are implicated in the problem, and as a counterpart, the issue of Indigenous language complicates the dilemma of illiteracy even further. The emphasis on fostering education in the country is an urgent one [6], but what language is best for a successful pedagogy? There are two ways to communicate on the island: French and Haitian Creole. These two languages are the sources of long-standing barriers, especially for the poor [7]. An estimated 2 to 5% of literate elite and upper middle class are fluent in both languages [8], whereas the peasants and the masses are only able to express themselves in Haitian Creole, a language they can neither read nor write.

In recent education reforms and regulations instruction in the native language have been implemented in most schools on the island with serious barriers complicating the problem of illiteracy instead of ameliorating it and fixing it. The native language has the reputation of being inferior [9] and is not welcome in school curriculum as a valuable tool to deliver instruction. Dissenting

opinions on the quality of academic language caused the failure of many educational campaigns, and eventually they were discontinued [2]. The choice of curriculum and the language of instruction between urban and rural schools are the subject of fixated controversies.

Another long-term effect of illiteracy in Haiti is the convoluted dilemma in publishing textbook materials. Books written in Haitian Creole are in short supply [10]. In the past, this language was used as a form of communication [9] without having a corresponding weight in formal instruction despite being the main mode of expression throughout the country. Investing in textbooks written in the native tongue has financial risk. Therefore, academic publications in the language are scarce in many subjects. Therefore, few authors are vested in academic publication, and the most recent of all, technology, which is a field with a particular language. This issue related to the language of instruction and the availability of textbook materials in the native language is unique to Haiti with a pedagogy that is different in the urban and rural schools. The latter being at greater disadvantage due to poor accessibility in remote areas with unkept road maintenance, unsafe conditions, and no transportation. The lack of electricity is a national concern that is affecting most inhabitants of the island, and it too is a contributor to illiteracy in the country.

The increase in population is a problem experienced all over Latin America [11]. In fact, population increase is a widespread phenomenon. When illiteracy could not be eradicated in Haiti 50 years ago with a lower population, how possible is it today to manage this problem. The natives continue to migrate to other countries. The political climate in the country is deteriorating, and illiteracy remains a national nuisance without a prospective future [13].

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