



INTERNATIONAL
LITERACY
ASSOCIATION



11th Pan-African Literacy For All Conference

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“LITERACY: A BRIDGE TO EQUITY”

Introduction

Nominated by the International Literacy Association–Africa Chapter, Uganda, under the auspices of the Reading Association of Uganda (RAU), is privileged to host, for the second time, one of the most prestigious literacy conferences in Africa. Known as “*The Pan-African Literacy for All Conference (PALFA)*”, the 11th conference in a biennial series will be held in Uganda’s capital Kampala from 20th to 22nd August 2019. Previously these conferences have been hosted by South Africa (1999), Nigeria (2001), Uganda (2003), Ghana (2005), Swaziland (2007), Tanzania (2009), Botswana (2011) and Kenya (2013).

Preamble

Equity in education was one of the five sub-themes of the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for all 2000 (*right to education; equity in education; inclusive education; quality education; and lifelong learning*) that was premised on the assumption by African leaders and development partners that there is a strong correlation between education and greater income, thus making education and literacy the single most sought after social ‘*equaliser*’. And indeed, for close to three decades most African leaders mobilised and focused their countries’ resources on the implementation of Universal Primary Education. And there is no doubt that this ‘*massification*’ of education has had a tremendous positive impact on the African continent.

However, this belief in universal access to education

as an equaliser has not been supported by evidence, and universal schooling has not created equity. In fact, Wan-Hsin Liu, at the World Economic Symposium, urged participants to ‘dismiss the belief in a one-to-one relationship between equal education resources and equal education outcomes. Before designing an effective policy package, it is important to recognise that equal education resources such as equal expenditure on students and equal facilities are empirically not found to result in equal outcomes.’ Equality and equity are two terms used in an effort to create fairness but, more specifically, equity connotes a strategy to give everyone what they need to be successful. Believed to be the missing link, equity will be the subject of debate and critical discussion at the 11th PALFA conference in Uganda in 2019.

Justification

By its nature, Africa is culturally, economically and politically fractured both at individual country and at continental level, thus making it an epitome of socio-economic inequity. Secondly, although the problem of illiteracy and its contingent problems are increasingly being recognised almost all over Africa, the level of commitment and the ability to eradicate it varies greatly and so does the equity gap caused by its effects.

Research has continued to prove that what happens in the early years of a child’s school seriously affects their later years. This is even truer for early literacy learning. For children to reach their learning potential,

equitable literacy instruction must become a standard practice regardless of their culture, of the economic capacity of their families and of where they are located. But even more importantly, there is continuously heightened appreciation that literacy, if well planned and executed, has the capacity to change lives and open up a world of possibilities for students in particular and society in general. The PALFA 2019, therefore, hopes not only to create awareness but also to build critical consciousness that literacy leaders need to develop strategies for sustainable equity in literacy for the citizens of our continent.

Core objective of the conference

- To bring together international and national policy makers, researchers, planners and practice experts to rethink strategies, policy and practice to position literacy as key and integral to delivering equity in Africa.
- Formulate a statement to the African Union calling for action on how to refocus resources to design effective strategies that will deliver equitable literacy instruction at formal and informal levels of education.

Specific objectives

- To critically examine possible areas and causes of inequality in literacy skills and particular ways in which African literacy leaders, policy makers, and education planners can combine efforts to position literacy as a tool for offering a level playing field to all.
- To provide a forum for sharing latest research and success stories in closing the literacy equity gap.
- To examine the role of language instruction in fostering literacy equity.

Who will attend the 11th Pan African Literacy for All Conference?

Ensuring sustainable literacy equity is not the responsibility of one individual agency, school administrator, government, donor or policy maker, neither has it been easy to identify one specific cause or origin of the current inequitable literacy crisis in Africa; and hence, no single group of professionals or agencies may be able to single-handedly close the literacy gaps in Africa. This will, therefore, necessitate combined efforts by all education stakeholders, including parents. Therefore, the participants and presenters will include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Literacy administrators, both local and international, who have practical knowledge and effective ideas as well as the passion to promote practices and programmes aimed at narrowing literacy gaps.
- Early childhood educators with practical experience.
- Curriculum specialists, both local and international, who will share key concepts and ideas when designing literacy curriculum and programmes, and appropriate instructional materials.
- Multilateral partners involved in funding education.
- Policy makers from both inside and outside Africa.
- Researchers and academics interested in literacy practices and social equity.

Sub-themes

1. Literacy teaching and coaching across the curriculum.
2. Role of information and communication technology (ICT).
3. Early childhood teaching and learning.
4. Leadership for equitable student achievement.
5. Gender and sustainable literacy.
6. Literacy curricula for equitable student achievement.
7. Literacy for equity outside the framework of formal education.
8. Rethinking literacy and inclusion.
9. The role of mother tongue.

Expected outcomes

- New initiatives to position literacy as a social equaliser.
- Capacity-building among African literacy educators for the effective implementation of programmes that target social equity.
- Greater responsiveness among literacy instructors to design programmes that target equity.
- Improved and shared international understanding of the effects of inequitable literacy.
- Better policy packages that target literacy instruction that is desired for equity.
- Better, deliberate and rationalised allocation of resources for better education outcomes.