


Literacy as a contribution to socioeconomic inclusion: The case of a youth group from Namibe, Angola

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ABSTRACT

Educated youth is vitally important for the future of Angola. Youth illiteracy is one of the obstacles to greater socio-economic inclusion. The country is committed to intensifying literacy with the aim of eradicating this complex obstacle with multiple causes (historical, economic, social, cultural, political, etc.). This study aims to show how literacy is transforming the socio-economic inclusion perspectives of a group of young people in the province of Namibe. A bibliographic and documentary research was carried out. This was a case study of a youth group from Namibe, Angola. In the empirical phase, focus groups were applied in November 2021 to 22 young people (13-18 years old) in a class of beginners in literacy, in Moçâmedes (host municipality). The results showed that it is the desire for "functional literacy" for the acquisition of knowledge considered necessary to be able to function socioeconomically in this context. These young people, previously excluded from the school system, felt socially discriminated against, victims of prejudice and some verbal aggression. They decided to start studies to change this reality. Despite the poor infrastructural conditions, schools are motivated and "happier". They believe that this learning will increase their socio-economic inclusion in that specific context.

Keywords: Youth illiteracy, Literacy, Socioeconomic inclusion, Angola.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is of paramount importance for the sustainable development of countries. The United Nations 2030 Agenda (signed in 2015) sets a deadline of 2030 for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4): quality education, "leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes",² adds the guarantee that by that year a substantial proportion of adults will be literate.

According to Silvestre (2003), education makes man and the world evolve, however, the task of educating is difficult. The difficulty lies in the complexity of the process, which involves multiple conditioning factors, namely socio-economic, cultural, or even political ones.

Angola is a post-conflict and developing African country. The country has a young population, according to the 2014 Census (INE, 2016), 65% is aged between 0 and 24 years (47.2% aged 0-14 years and 50.3% is between 15-64 years). Educated youth is vitally important for the future of Angola. Also according to the Census, only 77% of the population between 15-24 years old knows how to read and write (84% men and 70% women), 25% have not completed primary education (INE, 2016). Youth illiteracy is one of the obstacles to greater socio-economic inclusion of young people in this country.

This study aims to show how literacy is transforming the socio-economic inclusion perspectives of a group of young people in the province of Namibe, a province located on the southern coast of the country.

In order to achieve this goal, a bibliographic and documentary research was carried out. This is a case study. This research has a qualitative focus. In the empirical phase, focus groups were applied in November 2021 to a group of young literacy starters in precarious school facilities in a poor neighbourhood. The study focuses only on Moçâmedes, chosen among the other municipalities of the province of Namibe because it is the main municipality and consequently the most populous (according to the 2014 Census, about 60% of the Namibian population lives there).

ILLITERACY AND LITERACY

Illiteracy in Angola has historical causes, as due to colonial educational policies the common people had little access to education. After independence, as expected, the national situation was difficult in all areas, with great delay in terms of economic, social and educational development.

In the field of education, among other negative consequences, Angola inherited from the colonial regime Portuguese a literal illiteracy rate estimated at 85% of the economically active population (Strategic Plan for the Revitalization of Literacy - PEPRA, 2012). The literacy campaign

²<https://unric.org/pt/objetivo-4-educacao-de-qualidade-2/>



in Angola began in 1976. However, a post-independence civil war made it difficult to achieve the goals of this campaign.

The country has been at peace since 2002, however the war has left scars that still hinder the desired success of literacy. In 2005, the Ministry of Education of Angola recognized the existence of educational delays, and at the time, sub-Saharan Africa was "one of the countries with the highest rates of literal illiteracy and underschooling, a fact that conditions the process of economic and development recovery and stabilization" (p. 4). In 2019, one in four Angolans could neither read nor write.

According to Presidential Decree No. 257/19 of August 12 (2019):

Illiteracy in Angola is not just a residual problem inherited from the past (susceptible to emergency treatment or capable of being overcome through simple generational succession). This is a current and complex problem, which requires the implementation of consistent, lasting public policies that are linked to other economic, social and cultural development strategies (p. 5041).

Literacy in Angola is based on this Presidential Decree (No. 257/19 of August 12) aligned with the PDN – 2018 – 2022, which at the base had three projects, namely: eradication of illiteracy in Angola; reduction of school delay in Primary and Secondary Education; and vocational training and vocational guidance. The results of these projects are not yet known.

In addition to the historical causes, there are also others that complicate the phenomenon of national illiteracy, such as economic, social, cultural and political causes, etc. For example, in 2020, 4 million citizens missed literacy classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding policies, it can be noted that "despite the national effort, the allocation of budget resources for the education sector, the fight against illiteracy and youth and adult literacy is still less than half of what is internationally recommended in this area" (Freitas, 2014, n.p.).

The Angolan state is committed to intensifying literacy with the aim of eradicating illiteracy. Literacy becomes a national imperative. For Soares (2003), the restricted term of literacy, as teaching to read and write, is being rethought, because lately a broader meaning has been given to literacy as a permanent process for life, going beyond learning to read and write. In the same sense, Freitas (2014, p. 5) states that currently "literacy is understood not as a single concept, but as a plural concept, since it has become evident that it serves multiple purposes and is acquired in different ways".

In the educational context, the Angolan government considers literacy "a preponderant factor for the sustainable development of the country" (Presidential Decree No. 257/19, of August 12, p. 5040). For the Angolan State, "there seems to be a consensus that education, even at its minimum level of literacy, is a fundamental and indispensable condition for the full dignity of citizens and for the human and sustainable development of the country." (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 4).



It is pertinent to clarify that, according to Law No. 32/20 of August 12 (2020), literacy is part of Adult Primary Education and corresponds to the 1st and 2nd Grades, from the age of 15 and Post-literacy, corresponds to the 3rd to 6th Grades and is attended from the age of 17 (Article 55).

The Action Plan for the Intensification of Literacy, Youth and Adult Education - EJA-Angola Plan 2019-2022 emerged for the implementation of the Executive's policies for economic and social development, in which the fight against illiteracy is one of the main pillars.

In 2017 the Literacy Rate for Youth and Adults over 14 years of age was 75.3% and had a target for 2022 to be 82.8%, in which case the illiteracy rate would drop to 17.2%. The results of the EJA Plan are awaited in order to analyze its effectiveness.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

According to Gondim (2003, p. 145), "in the last two decades there has been a significant growth in the use of focus groups in research in various scientific disciplines". In the empirical part of this case study of a youth group from Namibe, this path was followed and focus groups were carried out in November 2021 with 22 young people (14 boys and 8 girls), between 13 and 18 years old, constituting a group of beginners in literacy in facilities with precarious structures in a poor neighborhood, in Moçâmedes.

Morgan (1997, cited by Gondim, 2003, p. 151) defines focus groups as "a research technique that collects data through group interactions when discussing a special topic suggested by the researcher. As a technique, it occupies an intermediate position between participant observation and in-depth interviews." It can also be characterized as a resource for understanding the process of construction of perceptions, attitudes and social representations of human groups (Veiga & Gondim, 2001, cited by Gondim, 2003, p. 151). This qualitative data collection technique was used to better understand the perceptions of the reality of literacy from the perspective of these young people.

The results showed that it is the desire for "functional literacy", since the main target is the acquisition of knowledge considered by the group itself as necessary to be able to function socially in this specific context.

These young people, excluded from the school system, have never attended school. They said they felt socially discriminated against, as well as victims of prejudice and even verbal aggression, among other negative attitudes due to the fact that they were illiterate. They decided to start their studies that year to change this sad reality. Despite the poor school infrastructure conditions, they are motivated to learn and feel "happier" with what they have already achieved.

Young people say that this learning will bring them: an increase in personal autonomy; increased socio-economic participation; a means for insertion into the world of work; better salary to increase the low economic conditions of the family and also to obtain bases for high school



(minimum condition for some jobs). They believe that they will be able to acquire social practices considered crucial for the group, such as: knowing how to make change well; not to be financially cheated; read important documents (especially news, subtitles of films and documentaries, SMS, prescriptions, prescriptions and medical indications, among many others); know how to sign and also know what you are signing; helping younger siblings with schoolwork; and so on.

By referring to the expected benefits, they showed conviction in this possibility and hope for a more promising future after the literacy process, which, they say, they have already seen "to be a little difficult, but not impossible".

CONCLUDING NOTE

The Angolan State considers the fight against illiteracy as a major pillar for the country's economic and social development. This study aimed to show how literacy is transforming the socio-economic inclusion perspectives of a group of young people in the province of Namibe.

The empirical results showed that it is a question of the desire for a "functional literacy" for young people, that is, to have knowledge considered by them as necessary to be able to function socially in this local context, in this municipality in particular, in the province of Namibe and in a post-conflict developing country. We have seen here, in this case, (youth) literacy considered as an important contribution to greater socio-economic inclusion in Angola.

The results of this case study of a youth group from Namibe, although simple, can contribute to a reflection on some points of this theme.



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