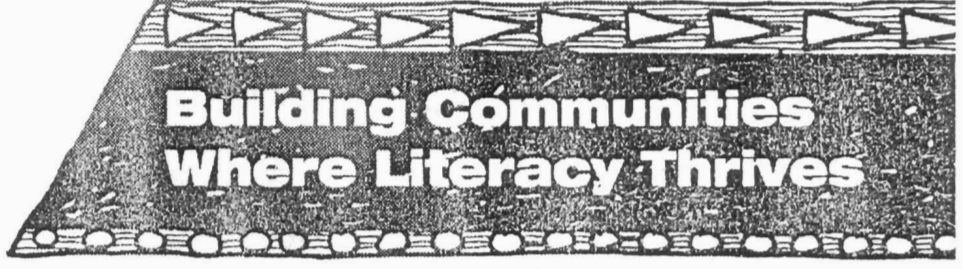


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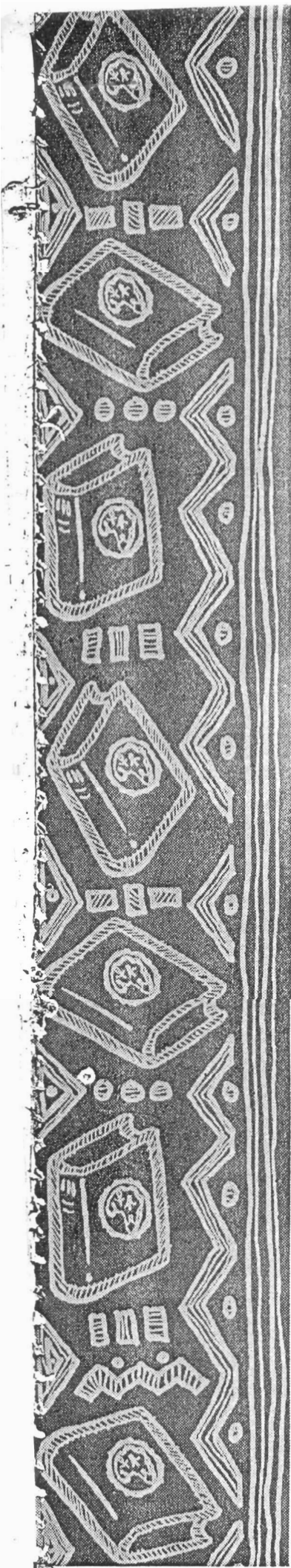
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The Karatu Workshops on Literacy and Development in Nigeria: A Participant's Experience

Wale Adegbite

Nigeria

Karatu (which means "reading" in Hausa) is a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) whose aim is to ensure that every Nigerian child learns to read. By training people who are already active in the reading development field, Karatu's Training of Trainers programme attempts to bridge the gap between people researching reading methods and people working at community level to teach children to read. This paper reports my experience on that programme.

Karatu's work is based on the Training for Transformation methodology, which is well-known worldwide in the adult literacy field (see Hope & Timmel, 1982; McCaffery, Obanubi, & Sanni, 2001). Karatu adapts this methodology to the training of people who are teaching children to read: teachers, parents, Mallams (teachers of the Koran), Sunday school teachers, and others. The Karatu trainers are trained in a rigorous series of workshops that are adapted to the needs of the individual group of trainees, and the course described here was modified for subsequent groups.

Aims of Karatu

Karatu seeks primarily to develop and promote literacy at the grassroots level in Nigeria through the use of Community Local Facilitators. It operates nationwide and has an institutional affiliation to the Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN). Karatu projects literacy as reading the word and the world. Literacy is viewed as an enabling medium for learners' development of themselves and their communities.

Karatu runs the following three main training programmes:

1. A Primary Instructional Methods in Reading (PRIMER) course of workshops in local communities with intensive classroom follow-up, covering all the basic reading content needed to implement the Karatu reading programme. This programme is not unique but is based on simple instructional methods practised in some of the schools in Jos, Nigeria, and documented by Oyetunde (1991) and in other RAN publications. The PRIMER course is structured by the specific needs of participants. Its aim is to make teachers and other individuals competent in teaching beginning reading skills to children by using child-centred methods.
2. A Classroom Literacy and Facilitation Skills (CLIFS) course for PRIMER graduates. This course situates reading content in the context of participatory methodology and also offers learning experiences in the areas of personal growth and interpersonal communication. The aim of CLIFS is to develop teams of Community Local Facilitators.
3. An advanced Training of Trainers (TOT) course for teacher trainers and others in training positions. The aim of TOT is to cascade nationwide the model of grassroots teams developing literacy for children and communities in local areas. The TOT course is the focus of this article.

The Karatu TOT Workshop Series, 1994–1997

The goal of the TOT workshop described here was to increase the manpower for effective literacy development in Nigeria by providing the trainees, who were relevant actors in the educational system, with further knowledge and skills about the teaching and promotion of reading in the society. This course was an intensive four-phased training programme with each phase comprising a full week of activities followed by at least six months of skills practise in real-life situations.

The first three phases were essentially oriented towards personal growth, acquisition of knowledge and skills on teaching methodology, and workshop facilitation. The fourth phase entailed co-facilitation with experienced Karatu facilitators in reading workshops for teachers. It also involved the participants working in classrooms with children.

Only two thirds of the people who started on the course were able to complete it because anyone who missed a phase was not allowed to proceed to the next phase. Training was focused on the process of experiential learning, exploration of ideas and feelings, and learning to work as a team. It was not possible to gain this experience simply from reading past workshop reports, and the only way for dropouts to continue was to join a subsequent set of trainees.

The participants were carefully selected and had among them nearly all the knowledge and skills necessary for organising an initial reading programme. The workshop was a means of sharing and structuring the participants' preexisting knowledge and skills. If any knowledge was lacking in the group, the participants had the research skills needed to look up information for themselves. They were able to identify areas in which they needed extra help, and at their request, resource people were brought in at various times to give presentations on topics such as proposal writing, rural development techniques, and nursery education. The next set of trainees made different requests.

The assumption behind the training was that in order to achieve Reading for All, there has to be a transformation of participants' attitudes and approaches, a searching out of the root causes of

reading failure, and a focused attempt to remedy these problems.

Structure of the Workshop—Intensity and Commitment

TOT was a residential workshop, and the location was outside town and self-contained. Activities took place from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. daily, with a break of two hours for relaxation and lunch. In addition to work during the day, participants took home assignments, which they did overnight and presented as feedback the following day. As much as possible, the participants' attention was focused on the centre and distractions were not allowed. The workshop venue was selected deliberately to ensure full concentration on the tasks.

The key principles that guided the workshop emanated from the psycho-social method (PSM) theory propounded by Paulo Freire (Freire, 1972; Shor & Freire, 1986). This theory was developed to counteract the assumption that educated people are able to "enlighten" rural people and others who have not received a formal Western education. The failure of rural development programmes often lies, according to this theory, in the fact that regard is not given to the community members' own ways, knowledge, and intelligence. The method demands a cycle of reflection and action with new action arising from the reflection and evaluation.

The principles of the PSM, upon which Karatu is based, are that no education is neutral—it is used either to control or liberate. The workshops do not provide answers but rather pose problems. The high rate of reading failure in Nigeria is caused not merely by inadequate instructional strategies but also by social factors. Karatu trainers have a specialized knowledge of their own area, which is important because the social situation is different in northern versus southern Nigeria and in urban versus rural areas. Karatu cannot tell trainees how to ensure effective literacy delivery in their specific situation, but it can make them aware of some of the possible problems and facilitate them in thinking about how they, the trainees, can solve them. Participants attempt to solve problems through dialogue so the trainer is a facilitator of this dialogue rather than a provider of information. Relevance to participants' needs is fundamental.

and the content of the workshop is modified in accordance with the needs of the particular group of participants. Through reflection and action, the participants look for the root causes of problems, and through dialogue, they find means to treat the fundamental problems rather than the symptoms.

Karatu Evaluation of Literacy Activities

Evaluation is also an essential component of the PSM that the TOT workshops use. At the end of the cycle of reflection and action, workshop participants need to discover whether the activities in which they have participated have had the intended outcomes. When tackling a specific problem in the area of reading instruction, for example, participants may identify other problems that require a modification of the planned programmes. Karatu's reading programmes constantly are being adapted in reaction to real-life, local situations.

Evaluation in the Workshop Context

In the TOT workshops, evaluation took place at the end of each day, with a major evaluation at the end of each phase. Changes in the programme were made on the basis of these regular evaluations, and the next TOT series—in which the author was a cofacilitator—was different in many ways from the series described here. Decisions in the workshops were made, as far as possible, on the basis of consensus, and different groups of participants had different needs and interests.

Appropriateness of the PSM to Reading Instruction

The application of the PSM to the development of reading skills, methodology, and facilitation techniques integrates the knowledge and application of some other principles and approaches. Namely, the PSM recognises the Integrative Language Teaching (Howe & Tomori, 1980) or Whole Language Approach (Goodman, 1986), in which relevant aspects of the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are stimulated towards a whole learning process (Onukaogu & Arua, 1997). In whole-language learning, a central principle is that there is no isolation of process from use and that language is learned best when the learners focus on its communicative use (Goodman, 1986).

Karatu methods support a teaching/learning model that ...

- ensures that the learner interacts with a text not only by recognising words and decoding the text's content but also by constructing the meaning; and
- ensures learner-teacher and learner-learner interaction in the classroom in preference to the teacher-centred or learner-centred presentation (Adegbite, 2000; Carrell; Devine, & Eskey, 1988) ...

Emphasis on process: Most methods of teaching initial reading that are used in Karatu workshops already have been discussed already in RAN's Literacy and Reading in Nigeria series (see Hughes, 1991). However, where Karatu is unique in its mode of presentation, Karatu participants have to become agents of their own learning, and because of this expectation, the workshop process is more important than the content. Karatu keeps records of all the participants, and the workshop facilitators are always ready to continue supporting them in the classroom, if requested. The facilitators continue to make information about reading available after the workshops are finished, and they are responsible for making participants willing and able to go on learning how to teach reading.

Reading itself is a subject in which teachers are more concerned with skills and attitudes than with knowledge. As such, it tends to get undervalued in Nigerian schools, where knowledge of content is usually emphasised. To become effective reading teachers in Nigeria requires a radical rethinking of the teacher's role, and Karatu workshops help teachers to undergo this transformation

Difficulty in effecting classroom change.

Experience shows that most RAN members have tried, through lecturing, to get teachers to learn how to teach reading; however, the attempts have not had the intended impact in the classrooms. The RAN members have come to realise that more than intellectual knowledge about reading methods is needed to make teachers teach reading effectively, and they have progressed to providing activity-based workshops in which teaching skills are practised. The workshops are usually stimu-

lating and enjoyable, and when the teacher participants are asked to evaluate them, they rate the workshops highly. Nevertheless, in the long term, the workshops seldom make much change in the classroom because the school system is too daunting. For example, classes are too crowded, the timetable is too inflexible, and the prevailing atmosphere in the schools is not supportive of change.

In order to transform the classrooms, the workshop participants first have to transform themselves into effective change agents. Karatu does not measure the success of a training programme by looking at the success of the workshop itself. Although evaluation of the workshop is important, more important is the continuing change within the participants after they have completed the workshop. Their implementation of what they learned in the workshop is the true indicator of success, and it is not easy to achieve or evaluate.

The need for strategic planning. Just as a well-conducted workshop is only the first stage in Karatu's work, so too an effective change in individual trainees is still not Karatu's ultimate aim. Individual classrooms where children learn to read may serve as models to other classrooms throughout Nigeria, but they alone are not going to change the literacy situation in the country. To achieve the major change needed in order to get reading instruction effectively introduced nationwide entails more than the transformation of individuals: It needs a concerted effort from all organisations concerned in eradicating reading failure. Therefore, in 2001, Karatu held a National Planning workshop for all its TOT graduates along with representatives from its CLIFS workshops. A total of 60 people met to prepare a strategic plan for Karatu, and that plan is still in the process of being implemented.

Conclusion

The task of bringing the knowledge and expertise of RAN members down to the grassroots level is daunting. Nonetheless, the interest in teaching reading is taking root in Nigeria, and in Karatu, we believe that with time and persistence it will continue to spread.

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