



EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN THROUGH MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

N.JOHNSON

Instructor in educational technology
Perunthalaivar Kamarajar College of education
Karaikal, U. T of Puducherry

Received: 09 October 2012

Reviewed & Received: 12 Nov 2012

Accepted: 12 November

Abstract

This article studies deals with the issue of media literacy. It initially offers some definition of media literacy and deals with such issues in this regards as the effect of technology on development of media literacy in 21st century. It also brings into limelight the role of media literacy on the development of general knowledge of women citizens and finally it considers the characteristics of media literate people. The findings of the study suggested that some factors have a key role in the successful development and advancement of media literacy among rural women.

Keywords: Literacy, Media Literacy

Introduction

Media literacy education provides a framework and pedagogy for the new literacy needed for living, working, and citizenship in the 21st century. Moreover, it paves the way to mastering the skills required for lifelong learning in a constantly changing world. It is stressed rightly at this juncture women should be harnessed to use technology and they should understand the importance of media literacy education.

Mass media came to change the way people communicate in society. The newspaper came to change the way people knew about news. This medium became the main provider of serious information about political, social, and economical situation.

The newspaper was also a local medium for audiences and advertisers. Magazines came to be incorporated into society as a complement of the newspaper. At the beginning, this medium had the role to publish general information about health, education, politics, economy and sociology. Film and television introduced new images and sounds projected on screen. Television have been through the years the primary source of information and entertainment with programs of all categories: drama, comedy, suspense, and education. In addition, cable television created a revolution in broad electronic media. Cable in mass media broadcasts a wider perspective about television, because of the transmission of international programs. This also changed the way people saw television and helped society become more cultural and have a broader perspective about the world (Ibid 190-191).

Computers have also changed the way people communicate. Previously people could only use telegraph and letters to send messages from one place to another. When computers and Internet were integrated in the world, chats and e-mail replaced the old methods of communication. These days, people know more about news, products, and services from the Internet. There are millions of web pages and sites that provide the public with all kind of information. Today, information about the world around us comes to us not only by words on a piece of paper but also, more and more, through the powerful images and sounds of our multimedia culture. From the clock radio that wakes us up in the morning until we fall asleep watching the late night talk show, we are exposed to hundreds—even thousands—of images and ideas from not only television but also Web sites, movies, talk radio, magazine covers, e-mail, video games, music, cell phone messages, billboards, and more. Media no longer just shape our culture—they are our culture.

Gandhian Approach

According to Gandhiji, literacy in itself is no education; it is not the end of education. His philosophy of education was based on his experiments with physical literacy and moral training at the Tolstoy farm in South Africa. He believed that the same soul resides in both man and woman and both of them should have equal opportunities to develop their personality. They are an inseparable pair and one cannot live without the other. (Gandhi, M.K 1951).

Swami Vivekananda's exhortation was "to educate your women first and leave them to themselves, then they will tell you what reforms are necessary". In cognizance with this view women should be the change agent in the society. They should empower themselves by

acquainting with latest trends in technology and should stand as a great agent in this knowledge society indeed Knowledge era.

Media Literacy in 21st Century

Media literacy is defined as the way people analyze and interpret messages from mass media. In her landmark book *Literacy in a Digital World: Teaching and Learning in the Age of Information*, Kathleen Tyner (1998) posited that media education is more about education than it is about media. For Tyner, media education “expands literacy to include reading and writing through the use of new and emerging communication tools. It is learning that demands the critical, independent and creative use of information”.

It is this convergence between media and education, between entertainment and learning, which is driving major change in the sources and the content of what women learn and how they learn in today’s world. Media literacy is not needed in the future; it is needed now, urgently, to assure that our women citizens are equipped to make the decisions and contributions a global economy and global culture demand of them.

Women citizens and Media Literacy

While these new technologies promote participation, plurality, and diversity of opinions, they also contribute to a stream of new challenges, such as unfiltered information, misinformation, copyright issues, and users engaging in unhealthy habits. Consequently, there is an urgency to instill media literacy in Women citizens to become critical consumers of information and to contribute to public discourse effectively. In developing media skills, women citizens can protect themselves and others from harmful content pushed mainly by new information and communication technologies. While new forms of literacies emerge as part of this new media landscape, they are not necessarily recognized and promoted as essential to thrive in a knowledge-based society. Yet because of the growing media convergence, women should be merged to promote the role of citizenship and active participation more effectively.

Characteristics of Women as Media Literate People:

Media literate people understand that media are constructed to convey ideas, information and news from someone else's perspective. They understand that specific techniques are used to create emotional effects. They can identify those techniques and their intended and actual effects. They are aware that the media benefit some people, but leave others out. They can (pose and sometimes answer) questions about who benefits, who is left out, and why. Media literate people

seek alternative sources of information and entertainment. Media literate people use the media for their own advantage and enjoyment. Media literate people know how to act, rather than being acted upon. In this way, media literate people make them as better citizens

Conclusion

According to the country report of the Government of India, 'Empowerment means moving from a weak position to exercise a power'. It is the ability to direct and control one's life (Paz Ruth, 1990). It is a process in which women gain control over their own lives of knowing and claiming their rights at all levels of society at the international, local and household levels. A tool which helps in the process of empowerment of rural women is technology and Media Literacy education.

Today's definition of literacy is more than reading and writing. In order to be functionally literate in our media-saturated world, women should be able to read the messages that daily inform us and entertain us. As the Internet becomes a fact of life, the critical thinking skills that help women navigate through traditional media are even more important. Through an extensive study on media literacy, we can reach the conclusion that the below factors have a key role in the successful development and advancement of media literacy among rural women. These factors include: 1. Media literacy 2. The Government should make academic education in media studies obligatory through adult education programme 3. Appropriate textbooks and audiovisual resources should be provided 4. Highlighting the importance of technology and imparting hands on training through women self help groups and NGO's 5. The establishment of media literacy workshops for rural women is recommended to engage them in this field.

References

- Gandhi, M.K. (1951), *Towards New Education*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.
Ibid., 190-191.
- Paz Ruth (1990), *Paths of Empowerment: Ten Years of Early childhood work in Israel*, The Hague, Bernard Ban Leer Foundation.
- Tyner, K. (1998). *Literacy in a digital world: Teaching and learning in the age of information*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.