

What is Literacy

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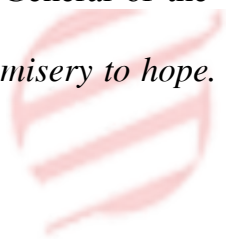
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Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen in a way that allows an individual to communicate effectively. It is an indisputable fact that proficient literacy skills open doors to better personal and social opportunities, and are the key building blocks for all successful societies or civilizations. Its importance can be elucidated by the words of the former Secretary

General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, when he states literacy to be “*a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty,*



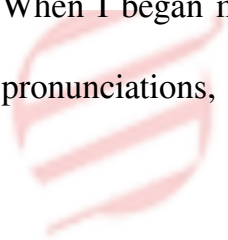
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and a building block of development...Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential." I had realized the importance of literacy at a very tender age, and I have constantly sought to improve my skills and knowledge tenaciously, experiences of which have been recounted in this paper.

Just like every individual, my learning also began at home. It goes back to the earliest days of my memory, wherein my parents used to tell me stories every night before bed, such as Aesop's Fables. This practice was a routine, and my parents enjoyed the experience as much as I did. The stories of magical creatures were not only fun as a child, they also conveyed quintessential lessons of life and taught me various virtues such as honesty, righteousness, hard work, individualism, compassion etc. Parents are the very first teachers in a child's life, and their involvement in his or her education is a stepping stone towards his or her development. The involvement of my parents in my learning has greatly motivated me to complete my education, improved my academic performance and has also sorted out any behavioral problems that may have surfaced. Growing up in a literate family which places learning at home at par with school education is one of the biggest contributing factors for my thirst for knowledge, and has shaped my personality greatly.

When I began my schooling, I struggled with my communication skills; I fumbled with pronunciations, misspelled words frequently and was not confident in my literacy skills.



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My parents and my teachers, however, taught me that I must learn from my mistakes and practice till I get them right. I drew great inspiration from my elders, and constantly sought to be an individual who would make them proud. I put greater emphasis upon improving my ability to read, write and communicate effectively, and was persistently chasing my goal. Through dedication, I was able to improve my literacy skills significantly, while expanding my knowledge through learning about new languages, cultures and subjects every day in school. This instilled great confidence in me and I became more sociable. I did not hesitate from participating in a lot more group activities, such as reading competitions, quizzes, spelling bees, creative writing competitions, which substantially assisted me and to improve my literacy skills.

When it comes to literacy and its significance, one of the prominent influences is borne by my grandfather. He has not received any kind of formal education, yet he is the greatest source of inspiration for me and my family. As a child, he was forced to drop out of elementary school and was asked to work on his father's farm. He was made to believe that working in farms is more important than going to school and earning a degree. However, he soon realized the value of education, and learnt how to teach himself without any assistance. He'd always been a poetry enthusiast, and with the most basic reading skills, he started reading poems. Eventually, after significantly improving his reading and writing skills, he began writing poems as well. With sheer determination and hard work, he taught

himself and attained literacy. My whole family considers his journey to be a great source of inspiration.

My grandfather taught me how learning is an everlasting process, and how I must always keep my mind open to new information and knowledge. Not only did he teach me how to learn from my mistakes, he taught me how to put my words and thoughts together in order to write and express what I feel. Even though he didn't get to complete his education, he constantly encourages me to seize the opportunity that has been provided to me and used to tell me, "learning is the gate to your dreams".

Literacy is a sequential process, and to me, one of the most important components of this journey is to enhance one's reading skills. I have been an avid reader since my childhood, which has improved my ability to better understand the value of having in-depth knowledge of all that is in my reach. What started out as listening to my parents read out fairy tales, I later developed tastes into a variety of genres – ranging from fiction to non-fiction. Through reading, I expanded my horizons and learnt about people, places and events outside my own experiences. For example, reading American stories, in particular, has greatly sensitized me about American culture. I've also developed the feeling of empathy, as it enables me to identify with the characters of the story. I have tried to detach

myself from the title “digital native”, and not kept my learning limited to technological sources. Indeed, it is necessary to move along with the times, but I place high importance on the primary sources of knowledge, books.

Throughout my journey towards attainment of literacy, I have had many wonderful reading and writing experiences that have led me to take the path I have taken. At each step, my literacy skills have not only been pursued to disseminate knowledge, but have also stimulated my questioning spirit. I have been brought up to think intensively and think critically, and use my literacy skills for the greater good.

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